WHEN VERNAL SUNS FORBEAR TO ROLL:
BELIEF AND UNBELIEF, DOUBT AND RESOLUTION
IN THE POETRY OF PHILIP FRENEAU

by
Joseph Jeffrey Griffith

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APPROVAL SHEET

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in the Poetry of Philip Freneau

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ABSTRACT

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This study analyzes and evaluates the pre-1790 lyric poetry of Philip Freneau through close examination of representative poems. Freneau should be taken more seriously as an artist and thinker than he now is: the notions that Freneau was "dwarfed and transformed" or "thwarted" by his environment and that he was "entirely congruent" to the literary and philosphic conventions of his day are contradicted by the poetry but have influenced the general critical estimate of the poet. Freneau was a careful poetic craftsman who not only sometimes reversed the poetic and philosophical conventions but also often used his poetry to examine his own philosophical relationship with the universe. The central issue for Freneau was not simply the essential transience of all life, as most critics have argued, but rather the lack of a phenomenological reality which could be reliably known. Thus Freneau was concerned with the development of a meaningful way to live in a world which he speculated might be void of meaning.

The introduction reviews past and present critical assessments and summarizes the standard critical views--Pattee's, Clark's, Leary's, Adkins', Bowden's; explains the editorial difficulties in dealing with Freneau's works; and outlines the dissertation's purpose, method, and organization. The body of the study consists of an examination of key lyrics from the editions of 1786 and 1788 which reveal the themes and formal artistic techniques characteristic of Freneau's serious earlier poetry. Each poem is subjected to three kinds of study. First the central thematic concerns of each poem and the patterns of symbol and image with which the poet conveys them are examined. Second the formal structure of each poem, showing how Freneau's manipulation of rime, rhythm, and spatial organization either underscores or undercuts his meaning is considered. Third the extensive revisions which Freneau made of these poems and their purpose and effect are analyzed. In each case, the first collected edition of the poem is used as the basis for discussion, following the chronology of the poem's publication as closely as possible.

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter one is the introduction; chapters two and three discuss the 1786 edition; chapters four and five the 1788 edition. Chapter six, the conclusion, recapitulates the major points made in the preceding chapters; briefly considers selected poems from the 1795, 1809, and 1815 editions; and assesses Freneau's achievement.

TO

MARIA

AND TO

LEZA and LYNNE

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WHEN VERNAL SUNS FOREBEAR TO ROLL

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WHEN VERNAL SUNS FOREBEAR TO ROLL

CHAPTER I - "On the Folly of Writing Poetry"

> Of all the fools that haunt our coast
> The scribbling tribe I pity most. . . .
>
> Philip Freneau in
> "On The Folly of Writing Poetry
> To Sylvius" 1788

The varied and conflicting views regarding Philip Freneau and his art are the result, perhaps, of his long and complex career as a man of letters. For example, H. H. Clark has called Freneau "The Father of American Poetry"[1]; yet Lewis Leary calls him "a literary failure."[2] Roy Harvey Pearce states that Freneau is "the only revolutionary [era] poet of any merit"[3] but believes that his poetry is "just [his] drive to exhaust himself of his bitterness and rage."[4] Robert E. Spiller notes that Freneau's contemporaries regarded him as "not quite respectable. . .a radical"[5] and explains that his poetry is "the most original" of his generation.[6] During his varied fifty year career, Freneau produced much verse which is, frankly, crude newspaper hackwork, intended mainly as political commentary or as copy filler. He is therefore often considered to be no more than a banal satirist or a gross political hireling. Even his considerable skills as an editor and as an essayist are often overlooked.

Freneau's involvement as the avid partisan of a political party has no doubt had much to do with the failure of his readers to recognize that he was also a skilled poetic craftsman who

shaped a small but important corpus of lyric poems that are remarkable for their structural and rhetorical virtuosity, their emerging symbolic and imagistic tendencies, their sophisticated manipulation of point of view, and their consistent thematic concern with the perplexities of the human condition. The assumption of many of those who have studied Freneau seems to be that his work is largely a simple extension of the British Neo-Classical tradition which may exhibit some tendency towards pre-Romanticism but which represents, in the last analysis, nothing unusual or highly original. This assumption has not been supported and, in fact, is not supported by the close reading of his lyric poems. That these works have lain unexamined is perhaps the major reason for the miscellany of critical impressions of his works.[7]

During this century five critics have undertaken major studies of Freneau's works. The first of these is Fred Lewis Pattee, whose three volume Poems of Philip Freneau contains an extended "Life of Philip Freneau" which was for years the standard biography and critical assessment. Harry Hayden Clark culminated his studies of Freneau with the publication of Poems of Freneau. The "Critical Introduction" of this volume contains an assessment of Freneau's art which builds upon previous studies which had appeared in published articles by Professor Clark. Lewis Leary's That Rascal Freneau is now the standard biography, having superseded Pattee, and is the most influential current critical assessment of the poet. Nelson F. Adkins' Philip Freneau and the Cosmic Enigma is the study of the religious

and philosophical influences on, and speculation of, Freneau. Finally, Mary W. Bowden's Philip Freneau, published while this study was in progress, is the most recent critical appraisal of the poet and offers a somewhat different perspective on the poet than that of any of the preceeding studies. In order to acquaint the reader with the purposes and premises of the present essay, I will discuss the positions of each of these students of Freneau and suggest their cumulative effect on my own approach and perspective.

While Professor Pattee's biography has been displaced, his attitude toward Freneau has not. Perhaps the most famous statement in Pattee's introduction is his remark that since Freneau's "temperament was Celtic. . .he had not the Teutonic stability"[8] to weather the vicissitudes of his unpoetic age and to achieve artistic fulfillment. This attitude, allied with the notion that Freneau was "dwarfed and silenced by his times and his environment,"[9] colors Pattee's pioneer commentary on the poet. While Pattee is personally sympathetic towards Freneau, he is intent on showing "how the young dreamer was gradually disillusioned."[10] As Pattee rightly points out, Freneau had "the poet's creative imagination,"[11] and he attempts to show that "Freneau was the most conspicuous pioneer in the dim romantic world that was to be explored by Coleridge and Poe [and] a pioneer in the movement that succeeded in throwing off the chain forged by Pope."[12]

What Pattee fails to point out, however, is that Freneau's long and careful study of Pope is very much a part of the equip-

ment which he uses to "throw off the chains."

Pattee is attuned to Freneau's personal struggle as a poet:

> He fitted himself by wide reading and classic culture; he received the full inspiration of a great movement in human society; he lifted up his voice to sing, but was smothered and silenced by his contemporaries. He was all alone; he had about him no circle...to encourage and assist; he had no traditions, religious or otherwise, that would compel silence. He was out of step with the theology of his generation; he was out of tune with the music of his day; he was beating time a half a century ahead of the chorus about him.[13]

Freneau was quite alone, but what Pattee fails to see is that the poet was not unstable, that he was not "dwarfed and transformed by his environment" but that he strove diligently over a period of more than fifty years to transform that environment into the stuff of his art. While Pattee recognizes that Freneau strenuously desired a break from the influence of British literature as well as British politics, he fails to see that Freneau was not crushed by his failure to accomplish these ends for himself--or even that the poet did accomplish these ends for himself. Close examination of Freneau's lyrics reveals that the poet worked consciously to disassociate himself from the control of British literary influence, and that he adapted the skills he acquired from the study of British Neo-Classicists and pre-Romantics to his own use. Moreover, he used his poetry as a means of clarifying his understanding of himself and of his personal relationship with the universe, and he consistently maintained the attitude that an individual must actively

seek to discover the nature of that relationship in order meaningfully to exist. The notion that Freneau was overwhelmed by the world which he inhabited is contradicted by the poetry he produced. Instead we find in the poetry the record of the education of the artist and the man.

Closing his introduction, Pattee opines that "true merit in the end is sure to receive its deserts" and predicts that "Freneau may even yet be given the place that is his!"[14] That this recognition has not yet occurred is due at least in part to the fact that Pattee's successors have fastened upon a subjective analysis of Freneau's character rather than on Pattee's critical evaluation of the poet's literary stature, superficial though that evaluation may be. Pattee's emphasis is, of course, editorial, and though his introduction remains in some aspects valuable, it attempts no close analysis of any of Freneau's poems. Further, Pattee's edition is not a satisfactory base for further scholarship because its dating of the poems is unreliable and because it does not include the variants of the many carefully revised works.

Professor Clark's several studies of Freneau are also notable for their perspective. Clark recognizes that Freneau "In an age of generality and abstraction. . .was a pioneer...in turning, as a poet, to the concrete and particular"[15] and claims that his simple, natural, concrete language contrasts with the "inane phraseology" of Pope.[16] According to Clark, Freneau's "naturalism. . .heralded our literary independence, so far as

themes are concerned, by bringing into poetry for the first time truly indigenous American nature. . .roses, daisies, daffodils, the honey-suckle, pumpkins. . .the 'loquacious whipporwill'. . .the caty-did. . . ."[17] Up to Freneau's time, according to Clark, American poetry "had been mainly versified homiletics" such as Michael Wiggleworth's "Day of Doom."[18]

However, while Clark argues that Freneau had solved "what Pater regarded as the greatest technical problem of the artist, 'the transmutation of ideas into images'," [19] he, too, tends to regard the poet as a noble failure. Freneau's genius, he says, was "thwarted by an age and associates indifferent to 'pure poetry'." Thus he believes that the poet was "unable to select and focus with concentrated intensity truly significant experience in such a way as to stir the reader's imagination, to suggest a symbolic quality."[20] I would suggest, however, that Freneau was challenged, rather than thwarted, by the "indifference" of his age. One important purpose of this study is to illustrate how effectively Freneau did what Clark says he could not do--focus with concentrated intensity truly significant experience. Clark, like Pattee before him and Leary after, attempts no close reading of a particular poem. Instead, although he recognizes some aspects of the poet's uniqueness, he emphasizes Freneau's supposed reliance on past poetry. "In all important respects," he says, Freneau "was entirely congruent to the tendencies of the time." Clark then outlines the influence on Freneau of the didactic and satiric poetry of Pope, Young, and Blair, as well as the influence of the revival of the classical study of Vergil and Horace, whose interested

student Freneau unquestionably was. Clark also alludes to Freneau's study of the "whole course" of English poetry--Sackville, Shakespeare, Milton--and to his interest in the past, his "ruminations on tombs of antiquity."[21] Clark assumes, however, that Freneau's having steeped himself in this art required that he slavishly imitate it. Yet Freneau was not subjugated by traditional forms but rather picked and chose among them in order to forge somehow the tools by which he might practice his craft, as would any serious poet. For example, as we shall see, his "The Vanity of Existence" is a masterful ironic reversal of the shallow piety of the conventional "life is vain" theme of the eighteenth century. This poem not only illustrates his rejection of the conventional notions of afterlife and salvation but also reveals one way in which he extends the range of his models. Furthermore, as Professor Bowden notes, Freneau often employed the forms and tones of the conventional in order to mock them.

Clark insists that the important theme in Freneau is "the brevity of human existence" and that this is "the indwelling master-thought which tends to dominate and shape his conceptions regarding every subject." But he also argues that "this is an idea which is practically a convention in English literature."[22] In advancing this notion, Clark disregards Freneau's insistence on America's breaking all ties with England and her influence. Transience is but one characteristic of life in a mechanistic

universe, the implications of which Freneau examines throughout his works. The central issues in Freneau are not, "Why is life so short?" and, "Why is life so frail?" but rather, "What is the nature of reality?"--if the question may be posed quite that simplistically, and I am not convinced that it can be--and "Given that nature, how does one live?" Freneau's art is not the naive verse of a derivative Neo-Classical or pre-Romantic poetaster but the controlled development of a poetry which is both an expression of and a buffer against his view of an ungraspable and inchoate universe.

Lewis Leary's That Rascal Freneau, like Pattee's and Clark's studies, is dominated by the image of the poet as a noble failure, a man both admirable and somehow pitiful. The Preface opens, "Philip Freneau failed in everything he did." Leary believes that Freneau "was never quite to escape from conventional forms"[23] and that "probing into the philosophical basis of Freneau's writings is an unprofitable occupation."[24] But, also like his predecessors, Leary generally deals superficially with the poetry. For example, "The Invitation" is for him simply "a plea to all brave men who would seek honor or wealth in the service of their country."[25]

Close examination, however, reveals that "The Invitation" may contain the key to Freneau's vision; it is an exhortation actively to sally forth and confront the basic essentials of life, symbolized in the impenetrable sea. It is a plea to abandon the security of land--boldly to seek to encounter the dyna-

mic, the fluid, the vital, and to escape the fixed, the passive, the dead. However, although he is personally sympathetic towards the poet, Leary seems to regard him as a pathetic dreamer, one whose "dream" is shattered into "a thousand pieces" by "reality."[26]

Leary's value to the student of Freneau is unquestionable, though, of course, one might sometimes decline to concur with his conclusions. No serious study of the poet may be undertaken without close study of the variations through which many of Freneau's key lyrics pass. Without Leary's exhaustive and accurate bibliography, the job of tracking down all of the variants would be virtually impossible. Moreover, Leary points out some of the direct literary influences on Freneau, although again, like Clark, his emphasis is directed toward Freneau's conformity to the poetic traditions of his day rather than to a consideration of the manner in which Freneau used and manipulated what he learned from his English models. For example, Leary carefully documents Freneau's debt to Pope; indeed he points out that the verbal similarity between "Windsor Forest" and "The American Village" suggests that the young Freneau followed the master's "very word tracks."[27] "So the poets of England spoke. . .through young Philip Freneau," he says.[28] Yet while recognizing Freneau's later desire that America free herself from the literary influence of England, he shows throughout the biography influences on Freneau by such poets as Pope, Thomson, Gray, Goldsmith, and Milton without clearly emphasizing the fact that Freneau does turn the lessons learned

from these poets to his own devices in his mature work. There can be no doubt that these writers influenced Freneau--he had no American models--but what is significant is not the ways in which Freneau's juvenile works resemble their works, but the ways in which his later works employ the techniques which he had acquired. Ironically, throughout That Rascal Freneau, Leary stresses the theme of freedom in Freneau. For example, Leary suggests that Freneau must have wondered if America would ever be free from the influence of Britain and points out that in Freneau's view America "was settling back into an easy reliance upon the methods and institutions of England. . . instead of rising steadfastly toward greatness in pursuit of the ideals which had inspired her during the Revolution."[29] However, while attributing to the poet the patriotic desire to liberate his nation, Leary does not sufficiently recognize that Freneau's desire to be independent of things British extends also, in some degree, to his own poetry.

Freneau was thoroughly acquainted with the Deism of his age, and it may well be true that when he was older, Freneau seemed to center all his conviction on the certainty that the God of Nature would somehow work all things together toward his own unchangeable ends, and that the ideal of human perfection might yet be realized, man yet knew not how, as human reason plumbed the mysteries which Nature spread before him,"[30] as Leary argues. While I believe that ambiguity is central

in Freneau, Leary feels that Freneau ultimately concluded that "his own failures. . .were the results of man's failure...to adjust himself to the great and harmonious scheme of which he was a part."[31] Leary assumes that Freneau had convinced himself that man could discover that scheme and adjust to it, but even in his old age, when the poet undoubtedly longed to believe that such a discovery could occur, his poetry carries in it the implicit awareness that such a discovery is not possible. Furthermore, the poetry of the 1780's clearly denies the notion that man can discover what Leary calls a "great and harmonious scheme" and, in fact, questions whether there is one.

Leary argues elsewhere in the same vein:

> Too much must not be made of Freneau. As a talented man he responded to the impulses of his time...borrowing whatever was found useful in content or form. . . .[He was] a transitional figure, grounded securely in the past and reaching tentatively toward the rewakening of a sensibility called romanticism. Read carefully he may be discovered a poet who wrote a single poem in a variety of forms.[32]

This is, bluntly, a narrow view. Not only does Freneau go well beyond simple borrowing; not only does he effectively utilize his grounding in the past as an integral part of his forward movement; but he progresses in the core of his lyric achievement, varied, rich, and complex, toward a resolution of what he sees as the essential human dilemma. Since there is no phenomenological reality which may reliably be known, how do we meaningfully exist?

Nelson F. Adkins succeeds in illuminating Freneau for us by doing what Leary says is unprofitable. Adkins proves the philosophical basis of Freneau's thought and identifies a central tenet in Freneau's philosophy of being:

> If living was to Freneau's pragmatic mind the essence of life, the rejection of much that Christianity embodied lay in its failure to meet fully the conditions of everyday existence.[33]

Because Freneau is a seeker and Adkins recognizes this fact, Adkins understands that Freneau came to reject all the conventional and even the unconventional beliefs of his time. Yet he seems not to see that the poet had worked out a kind of solution to the problem of belief through the dynamic process of his art. Says Adkins:

> The reason for Freneau's exploration of the philosophies of the ancients may certainly be traced in part to a. . . desire to meet life squarely and honestly. . . .If Freneau came finally to reject the life to come, it was to see with clearer eye the life which lay directly in his path.[34]

This attempt to deal honestly with life is clearly reflected in the lyric poetry of Freneau, but Adkins' helpful synthesis of Freneau's thought fixes on the conclusion that the poet's quest for a basis of belief was speculative and eclectic, when, in fact, it was reasoned and consistent, as the poetry shows.

Central in Adkins' argument is the undeniable fact that Freneau was "a man in search of a philosophical creed."[35] Adkins presents considerable detailed evidence that Freneau

was much influenced by Lucretius, in whom the American apparently discovered a kindred spirit.[36] "In so far as Freneau was prone to accept the hypothesis that God. . .best reveals himself to man through nature and that 'man's inhumanity to man' has been mainly the result of his deviation from the true course of nature," says Adkins, he "may be considered a Deist."[37] But, since Lucretius "insisted upon a universe capable of functioning without divine creation or guidance" and had "discovered a lack of cosmic design which further precluded the possibility of God's existence,"[38] Adkins believes that the Lucretian influence "led [Freneau] away from the essential principles of deism"[39] and resulted in an "unqualified rationalism and. . . opposition to conventional religious belief."[40]

It seems contradictory, then, that Adkins would state that "what in Lucretius had been a tragic sense of man's helplessness in the hands of an inexorable universe was often to Freneau but the familiar romantic melancholy of his age."[41] Freneau's "unqualified rationalism" would rather, as Adkins elsewhere states, enable him clearly to perceive a "nature capricious and unstable"[42] and to recognize that man may be "at the mercy of nature's fluctuating moods."[43] Instead of succumbing to "romantic melancholy," Freneau finally found a measure of hope, I believe, in his vision of what Adkins describes as the "moral heights [that might] be reached in a world where all is flux, where every manifestation of life, physical and mental, is but a fresh arrangement of atoms"[44]--the world of the Lucretian atomic theory.

Adkins' observation that "with all Freneau's denial of immortality and his rationalization of death--with all his desire to snatch from the moment whatever of happiness it might give, he still clung, a child of his age, to the doctrine of perfectibility,"[45] points to the poet's characteristic concern with the potential effects on man of a universe "where all is flux." If the poet's perception of the world were such, the development of his thought and of his craft would necessarily be fluid, often uneven, and always affected by the influence of each new experience and idea--and his attitude would be essentially stoic and ultimately hopeful, not melancholy. Therefore it is not surprising that we find in Freneau the development of a "philosophical creed" which posits man's potential perfectibility while freely recognizing his weaknesses, which recognizes the necessity that man constantly strive to achieve his highest potential while realizing that that goal is unattainable, and which takes great satisfaction in the bittersweet rewards of continuing always to seek that goal nonetheless.

Mary W. Bowden argues that Freneau "made it clear, in [his] later years, that he wished to be remembered as a poet, not as an essayist or a party newspaper editor."[46] and raises an issue largely overlooked by the earlier critics. "More often than not," she says, "he satirized the genre in which some of his most famous poems are included."[47] In fact, she goes so far as to state that he often manages "to mock the conventions by extending them so far that they become comic."[48]

Freneau's ability to "mock the conventions" becomes one of the central concerns of Bowden's sweeping overview of Freneau's works. However, while she admits that "the unusualness of his mocking his own well expressed themes strikes us again and again,"[49] Bowden does not examine the extent to which this "mocking" may go. As an example, she points out the effect of the surprise ending of "The Modern Miracle,"[50] which reverses the expectations generated by the sentimental tastes of its audience by showing how the physician, Sir Gilbert,

> . . .by passion led,
> Explor'd the kingdoms of the dead
> Reliev'd the fainting maid so fair,--
> Out-doctor'd death--and got an heir!

"On A Honey Bee. . ." is also cited as a poem which mocks "the current taste for melancholy".[51] Bowden stresses the comic aspects of these works but she does not discuss the manner in which Freneau manipulates the conventions without holding them up to the relatively obvious mockery of humorous satire. Poems such as "The Vanity of Existence," "The Vernal Ague," and "The Wild Honey Suckle" are representative of those which go beyond mere "mockery" of "current tastes" and challenge the philosophical and religious tenets of the age.

On one hand, then, Bowden glimpses a significant aspect of Freneau's art, his conscious attempts to reverse and control the poetic conventions; but on the other hand, she fails to see that this reversal penetrates ultimately to the core of conventional religious belief. "The Vanity of Existence" is Freneau's "most famous life-is-vain poem," Bowden says, and adds that here the poet follows the conventions "in order to present the

glories of the life to come. . . ."[52] In fact, the poet only appears to follow the conventions while he subtly manipulates them in order to show ironically that the afterlife is just a delusion. The concluding stanzas of "The Vanity of Existence" do not, according to Bowden, "put the reader in an exalted frame of mind."[53] Freneau's "bank of mud" is not intended to do so. Both "The Vernal Ague" and "The Wild Honey Suckle" are seen as being well within the melancholy genre and essentially conventional. "Freneau's early poetry contains a number of verses that evoke melancholy by discussing death and the vanity of existence; usually, as in the popular English verse of the era, the subject is expressed by moralizing about the seasons," Bowden declares.[54] Again, however, Freneau coolly employs the conventions in order to state the unconventional, perhaps the radical, that "endless winter" is inevitable and that there is no rationally acceptable evidence to support the notion that there is an afterlife.

The precise relationship between Freneau and the British tradition with which he is so often associated is not a simple one to define. However, the American differs in both form and substance from his models. That is, both his attitude toward the nature of poetry and his attitude toward the nature of the universe are quite his own. Freneau's view of poetry seems to grow out of his view of nature, as perhaps did the respective views of diverse poets such as the Neo-Classicists Pope and Johnson, the "pre-Romantic" Thomson, and the many others with

whom Freneau was familiar. Bonamy Dobree recognizes the complexity of eighteenth-century religious belief but generalizes that "all that need be noted is the strong pull towards Deism. . . . Those who tried to reconcile natural philosophy with religion arrived, as Thomson did, at a kind of 'natural' Deism which involved the finding of a moral pattern in Nature, and attempting to mold oneself by it."[55] Geoffrey Tillotson points out that "external nature was not much regarded for its own sake, [but] was often regarded for the sake of a straightforward theology and an everyday science. The creatures were a continual proof of the wisdom and variety of the mind of the Creator."[56] Similarly, "the belief that the universe was ordered, both physically and morally, by a benign and sagacious planner was at the bottom of much eighteenth century deism," says David Daiches.[57] But, though this belief may have been generally held, it was not universally held. As Daiches explains, Hume had shown that "the analogy between the universe (which is unique) and humanly designed objects" is a false one, and that "even if we were to accept [the analogy] and infer from the natural world the existence of a designer, such an inference would tell nothing about his attributes and might well suggest that he was a novice or a blunderer."[58] This is a position similar to that taken by Paine, who concluded that although reason can discover the existence of God, "it falls infinitely short in discovering the whole of [his attributes]."[59] Freneau may ultimately arrive at a position something like Paine's; but, as we shall see, by no means was the poet's move-

ment toward that position easy, nor is his arrival a matter of any great certainty. In the poetry of the 1780's, Freneau questions the beliefs that there is a "moral pattern in nature" and that "the universe [is] ordered by a benign and sagacious planner." The absence of such a planner is conspicious in the lyrics of the Eighties: Nature is not, for the Freneau of this period, proof of God's handiwork.

All of this is not to say that Freneau was a radical in revolt against "Eighteenth Century Thought." Indeed, "Eighteenth Century Thought" is too varied for neat labeling or facile division into schools. However, there is little question that Freneau stands outside of the frame of reference attributed to the poets who are generally regarded as his models. Yet perhaps the critical view that Freneau was "entirely congruent" with his times may be sustained if one argues that his times were so intellectually miscellaneous that any and every philosophical stance was "entirely congruent."

Although Freneau appears, by the time of the poems of 1809 and 1815, to have decided that belief in the existence of God is rationally valid, he did not accept the corollary view that there is an afterlife of the soul, a view which even Paine seems to have held[60] and one which was common among eighteenth century poets such as Pope, Johnson, and Thomson. Freneau vigorously denies this view in the poems of the eighties, and remains ambiguous until the end of his writing career.

Freneau's handling of nature is in direct contrast with

that which Tillotson attributes to the Augustans. They "were concerned with seeing [nature] not so much as they knew it deserved to be seen but as they wanted to see it. They superimposed on nature what they considered at certain times to be desirable. They are interested in nature as it is controlled by man," he says. Pope, argues Tillotson, "superimpose[d] on nature some of [his] own humanity. . .intellectual and sophisticated."[61] In the same way, Augustan pastoralists

> . . .controlled [the landscape's] appearance in their verse with the same rigid hand that King Charles's gardeners had used on the configuration of St. James's park. They 'methodized' it by taming it in diction. . . .The landscape, always limited in pastoral, was further limited by being robbed of all its characteristics except those which proved its gentleness, its 'tamedness.' The brook could be there but should be a stream. . . .There would be woods, but not so near you could see any 'knotty, knarry barren trees old.' The woods would [be distant] and seen as a whole. . .This is how they composed their sylvan scenes. . . ."[62]

Freneau, in contrast, deals with nature not as a distant, harmonious whole, but rather as a complex system of interrelated, sometimes discordant, elements. Sometimes gazing intently at specific natural objects or processes, as in "The Wild Honey Suckle" and "The Vanity of Existence," at other times describing dynamic settings, as in "The Lost Sailor," Freneau moves among the phenomena he writes about, attempting to see them as they are. Indeed, poems such as "The Dying Elm" and "The Vernal Ague" reveal Freneau's awareness that superimposing one's "humanity" on nature is a delusive and self-defeating activity. For the American poet, the

surface of the natural universe--the forest, the sea--is far less important than the reality it envelops.

On one hand, then, Freneau's view of the universe, particularly his view of God, nature and the afterlife, is rather different from the views most typically held by British poets of the early and middle eighteenth century. On the other hand, Freneau seems to have had a different sense of the nature of poetry as well. As Ian Jack has suggested, Augustan poetry "was written by men living in the last age of the Renaissance, who still had... critical theory to afford them guidance."[63] Thus, while Pope and Johnson, and even Thomson, might employ what Jack calls "sublime and lofty diction" or "abstract generality of idiom,"[64] Freneau, in a new world where the tradition was crumbling, used a more common, direct speech. Jack rightly points out the falsehood of the familiar misconception that these British poets were "unwilling to 'call a spade a spade'." No "reputable" Augustan poet "had the slightest hesitation in using familiar words in his verse, so long as decorum was not violated," he says.[65] Granted that remarks such as H. H. Clark's reference to the "inane phraseology" of Pope are likely to be overstatements, Freneau's diction in his lyrics is quite unlike the "lofty and sublime." He was writing for a very different audience than that of the Augustans.

And, of course, Freneau's relationship with his audience is also different. Eighteenth-century British critic John Dennis argued that the greater 'poetry' is an art by which a

poet justly and reasonably excites great passion in order to please and instruct and make mankind better and happier."[66] The didactic purpose of much eighteenth century has been thoroughly documented.[67] Conversely, Freneau, in his lyrics, seems to have no didactic intent. The purpose of these lyrics is simply to examine the nature of certain phenomena and to report the findings.

Perhaps the best specific example of the manner in which Freneau departs from the Neo-Classical tradition lies in his handling of nature. In The Mirror and The Lamp, M.H. Abrams defines the Neo-Classical tenets regarding "that nature which is to be imitated by art":

> 1. pleasant or beautiful objects or aspects of things;
> 2. objects which are synthesized from parts found separately in nature;
> 3. the central tendency, or statistical average, of the form of each biological species;
> 4. the generic human type rather than the individual;
> 5. the prominent, uniform, and familiar aspects of the inner and outer world.[68]

Freneau instead fixes on the bank of mud, the hurricane, the oak, the wild honey suckle, the "Neversink" hills, the caty-did. In his poems we find Shalum, the dying Indian; Ralph, the lost sailor; Celia, the scornful lady. However, Freneau does take great care to employ the word choice, the riming effect, or the rythmic variation which will produce a specific effect on his audience. Jack describes a like concern of the Augustans as "the deliberateness with which they set out to

gain their effects, and their skillful adaptation of means to the end desired."[69] Freneau's ability to adapt his means to his end is evident in the lyrics of the 1780's: obviously Freneau learned much from the numerous British poets whose work he studied. Although Freneau's debt to British poetic tradition has been amply shown, and although the purpose of this essay is not to contend that in this or that specific manner Freneau was a rebel against Neo-Classicism or some other literary mode, the American poet's originality must be recognized.

Thus we must raise the basic question one asks of a poet: How do his poems function? How and what do they mean? What is the poet's relationship to his materials and to his craft? Consequently, the concern of this study is closely to examine a series of Freneau's characteristic short lyrics. These lyrics will be considered, in the chronological order of their publication, so that the development of the poet's involvement with certain themes may be analyzed. Further, revisions made as these poems were collected from newspapers, or as they were reprinted from edition to edition, will be examined so that the poet's changing relationship to his materials may be considered. Five large scale editions of Freneau's poems were collected during his lifetime, in 1786, 1788, 1795, 1809, and 1815. The '86 and '88 editions collect materials published in the current periodicals. Poems collected in '86 are not reprinted in '88. The '95 edition is regarded as the most autho-

ritative of the five because it was personally edited and printed by the poet at his own press. In this edition, most of the poems of the '86 and '88 volumes are reprinted along with pieces printed periodically in the interim. The 1809 is a similar compilation, including works published in '86, '88, '95, and a smattering of more recent works since published in the papers. The 1815 edition contains nearly all new materials, some of which antedate but were not collected in the 1809 edition.[69]

The examination of these editions is often a difficult task because the individual poems often go through a complicated process of emendation and revision. For example, "The Dying Elm" was first printed in three stanzas but was later published in a revised four stanza form which is a substantially changed and strengthened work of art. "A Moral Thought" becomes "The Vanity of Existence", a poem which through the alteration of a pronoun and the change of title is entirely transformed. Thus, if the student of Freneau is to render an adequate reading, the major variants must be considered,and the reasons for the revisions must be accounted for. In short, a kind of variorum text of each poem must be compiled, since no modern edition does so. Thus, the original newspaper or collected edition of each poem has been consulted and the subsequent editions have been compared.

The approach I will follow in presenting my findings is as follows. Generally, key poems will be considered in the context of the major works with which they are contemporary.

Each poem will be treated in the order of its original publication in the case of poems initially published in the press, and in the order of pagination in the case of those first published in the collections. Variants will then be discussed in the order of their respective publication. When this method is used, the development of the poet's thought may be traced, a pattern of the poet's attempts to distance himself from the poems develops, and an attempt, generally, to heighten the metaphoric levels of the poems is revealed. Moreover, the revisions often tend to illustrate the poet's handling of the conventions of his century. Why the poet chose to alter the poems in this manner is a question which this study will seek to answer.

Freneau's public poems, his satires and occasional verse, are generally outside the scope of this study. Instead, Freneau's private poems are the main concern. These are the brief, intensely personal, symbolic works in which the poet employs the immediate experience of natural phenomena--plants, trees, mountains, the sea, even other people--as the touchstone by which to examine his relationship with the universe and with himself. Freneau probes the nature of death, and the nature of time, flux, and transience, and through that probing attempts to discover how to live.

A cluster of interrelated themes tend to emerge as central to Freneau's thought. The poet again and again explores the nature of the dichotomy between appearance and reality and early reaches the conclusion that there is no phenomenological reali-

ty which may be reliably known. Unlike contemporary deists, some of whom were subjects of Freneau's deep admiration--Jefferson and Paine, for example--Freneau found no evidence in natural phenomena which could lead him rationally to the conclusion that there is a benevolent creator. Moreover, he found no evidence by which to support the notion of an after-life. In the poems of the 1780's, his disillusionment is particularly evident and seems to have led him to a crisis of personal belief. As I have suggested, the question which Freneau faced may be posed thusly: if there is no God and if there is no eternal life of the soul, is not our present life essentially meaningless? At least in the beginning Freneau's answer to this question may have been "yes." However, his sense of the value of the individual human being was so strongly rooted that he could not long accept such an answer. Therefore,I believe that Freneau began to develop a practical humanitarian creed which stresses the necessity that the individual constantly strive to understand himself and his changing relationship to the universe as fully as possible. To the extent that one strives,his life is meaningful. The responsibility is placed squarely on the individual.

Gradually Freneau seems to have realized that the lack of concrete evidence affirming the existence of God or the existence of eternal spiritual life is balanced by the corollary lack of evidence denying their respective existences: the evidence constrains neither affirmation nor denial. Therefore the hope

that a benevolent creator exists and that the soul is eternal is tempered in Freneau's later poetry by his awareness that such hope is as likely to be false as it is to be true.

The tension between doubt and belief is one which was characteristic of Freneau's poetry during the 1780's. This tension, growing out of the poet's perception of the cleavage between appearance and reality, generates intense concern with several sets of dichotomies: flux and stability, activity and passivity, and life and death. One method through which the poet attempted to examine the nature of these opposites is through their symbolic association with sea and land; Freneau often juxtaposed land and sea in order to explore the effects on the individual of the security of land and the danger of the sea. The land frequently comes to represent stability; the sea, flux. However, the safety of the land could be destructive to that individual who might be lulled into a life of passivity. The individual who goes to sea, who confronts there actively the elemental chaos of nature, grasps more fully the nature of the world he inhabits. Thus land is associated with stability and passivity, and sea is associated with flux and activity. The passive quality often attributed to life on land comes to represent a kind of death in life, in that it is empty; while the activity of life at sea, perhaps because it constantly tests the individual, becomes a type of that life which the poet regards as most meaningful.

There is, unfortunately, no neat pattern of events in Freneau's life which lends itself to the formulation of "periods"

with which to label the poet's development. Therefore, the organization of a discussion which attempts a chronological examination of the development of the poet's thought is not easily divided into sections. However, the following organization, though far from symmetrical, seems sensible. Chapter Two will provide biographical background and will examine those poems published in the 1770's and early 1780's which establish the context within which the major lyrics of 1786 must be read. Chapter Three will then focus closely on five key lyrics which reveal Freneau's artistic and philosophical concerns in the '86 edition. Chapter Four will provide additional biographical material and will likewise examine certain poems of the mid-80's which provide the context for understanding the lyrics of the edition of 1788 and which illustrate the continuing development of Freneau's control over his vision. Chapter Five will analyze five key lyrics which reveal Freneau's stance at the height of his creative powers. Chapter Six will survey the editions of 1795, 1809, and 1815; summarize the major themes and developments in Freneau's work; and draw conclusions.

The focus of this study is, then, the poems of the 1780's. Such a focus is sensible for several reasons. First, the early poems, particularly those published before 1780, are less important in themselves than as avenues by which to reach an understanding of the more mature work. Second, the major lyrics of 1786 and 1788 are revised and reprinted in 1795 and in 1809. Freneau produced many more poems than these, of course, but

his continued involvement with them suggests that he considered them to be at the core of his achievement.[70] Third, the poems of the 1780's most effectively illustrate the poet's crises of belief, his attempts to reorganize his world view, and his gradual success in gaining control over both is vision and his artistic ability to express it. These poems are the most concrete, the richest metaphorically, and the most personally intense which he produced. They are the culmination toward which his early works build, and the watershed from which his later works flow.

I have tried not to approach Freneau's work with any preconceived notions of what he is trying to do. Indeed, it seems to me that a weakness of some of the prior criticism has been that it has approached the poet through the filter of previous assessments.[71] Instead, I have attempted to examine the individual poems closely, in order to discover if they contain, individually or as a group, characteristics which suggest the criteria by which they should be judged. In other words, I have attempted to examine the poems inductively, on their own terms. For example, if we find that a poem is structured in a specific way, that its sound patterns are particularly crafted, that it relies on the impact of a specific concrete image, or on the associations generated by a certain symbol, then we must evaluate the poem in those terms. I would argue that the historical and biographical approaches generally taken to Freneau's work deal too superficially with the poetry and consequently with the poet. The problem is that these critical approaches have been largely deductive. That is, evidence

external to the poems has been imposed upon them: Freneau's study of Neo-Classical poetry, Freneau's supposed love affair in Jamaica, Freneau's religious training. In short, a variety of assumptions have been made but cannot be supported by inductive analysis of the poems. For example, only a close linguistic and structural analysis reveals the complexity of "The Hurricane," a poem which Bowden says she is "tempted" to read on "metaphysical levels" but of which she says finally that the last three stanzas "somewhat obscurely suggest. . .a metaphysical lack of safety."[72] This statement comes in spite of the fact that Bowden gets closer to the poetry than some of her predecessors and seems to result from the general assumption, never verbalized, that Freneau need not be taken seriously as a conscious artisan. "The Hurricane" is a metaphoric representation of that very "metaphysical lack of safety" which Bowden is "tempted" to discern. My own first contact with Freneau occurred in something of a vacuum--having been unaware of the views of Pattee, Clark, Leary, or Adkins, I was forced to attempt my own personal interpretations. Testing my own individual responses against theirs later, I concluded that a real need existed for sustained critical reading of the individual poems.

While I do not reject all that has been written about Freneau, I believe that enough has been deduced about Freneau's art from the external facts. The time has come to examine the internal life of the poetry.

I believe that the picture of Philip Freneau which will emerge will be that of a careful craftsman, one who consciously controlled the devices and techniques of his medium in order to make concrete and decipherable the chaos he felt surrounded him. His attempt to develop a pragmatic poetry which embodies a philosophy of how meaningfully to live deserves, a hundred and fifty years after his death, the recognition it has never received.

CHAPTER II: "Freedom Of The Mind": The Early Poetry

When, in 1786, the first collected edition of his works was published, Philip Freneau had returned to the sea, as the thirty-four-year-old master of a coastal trader. Since his graduation from Princeton in 1771, the poet had occupied himself variously as teacher, student of theology, sailor, militiaman, editor, translator, printer, and postal clerk. In 1776, Freneau had left the rebellious colonies to spend about two years in the Carribbean, chiefly on Santa Cruz and Bermuda. After returning to the States and dutifully serving his tour in the New Jersey Militia, Freneau shipped on board of the Aurora and in May, 1780, was captured by the British and imprisoned first on the prison ship Scorpion and later on the hospital ship Hunter.

Freneau nonetheless managed to write and publish as well. In 1772, two slim volumes, A Poem on the Rising Glory of America and The American Village, appeared; these were followed in 1775 by American Liberty and a number of broadsides. During 1779, "The Beauties of Santa Cruz," "The Dying Elm," and "The House of Night" appeared in United States Magazine as did several political pieces. In 1781, the year following his experience as a prisoner of war, The British Prison Ship was published; and shortly thereafter Freneau began editing the Freeman's Journal, to which he contributed "A Moral Thought," the poem which was later to become "The Vanity of Existence." Freneau

remained as editor of Freeman's Journal only about a year, but he continued to contribute poems, including "The Dying Indian" in 1784 and "Verses Made at Sea in a Heavy Gale" in 1785. The latter poem, which was later retitled "The Hurricane," appears to have grown out of the poet's experience in a fierce storm off Jamaica in 1784 while he served as supercargo aboard the trader Dromelly.

Perhaps the remarkable variety of Freneau's experiences explains the remarkable variety found in his works. Yet perhaps this variety of poetic styles and subjects--occasional, political, philosophical--people, places, phenomena--is simply the reflection of the poet's intellectual curiosity and his interest in all manner of human experience. At any rate, the 1786 edition embodies the poet's diversity. The volume contains translations from the French such as "Humanity and Ingratitude"; the much discussed "Graveyard" poem, "The House of Night"; the lush "The Beauties of Santa Cruz"; the bitter product of his wartime imprisonment, "The British Prison Ship"; the philosophical "Plato. . .to. . .Theon"; and a variety of political and occasional pieces. In addition, the volume contains several of the poet's major lyrics, such as "The Dying Indian," "Verses Made At Sea. . .,"and "The Vernal Ague." Also included are a thoroughly revised version of "The Dying Elm" and the as yet unaltered "A Moral Thought."

The earliest poem which Freneau produced on his own, however, is not reprinted in the '86 edition. While "The American

Village," 1772, is apparently a highly derivative work,[1] it nevertheless introduces concerns upon which the poet later focused intensely. Superficially, the poem develops the eighteenth century Neo-Classical theme lamenting the passing of the ideal pastoral world. Nevertheless, the poem denies the central assumptions of the pastoral tradition: the past natural idyll is not regainable, and the possibility of harmony between man and nature is unlikely. "Envious time conspiring with the sea"[2] destroys the "lovely isle" (l. 87) which would have been the natural paradise where man could have lived in "happy ignorance divinely blest" (l. 141). Decay, then, is inevitable, and flux cannot be forestalled. Transience precludes the ideal existence, so "The American Village" celebrates America as a useful alternative.

The story of Caffraro and Colma, an idealized Indian couple, forms the central narrative of "The American Village." With their son, the two lovers are transporting furs in their canoe when the craft springs a "large leak, the messenger of fate" (l. 271). In order to save his wife and child, Caffraro tries to sacrifice himself, but Colma stops him, and, arguing that they will finally be together again in another world, plunges to her death despite Caffraro's efforts to save her. Of course, Caffraro remains true to the memory of his Colma, awaiting the day when "in some strange fancy'd land" he may again share "the fragrant grove/Its vernal blessings, and the bliss of love" (ll 373-5) with her. However, the narrator of "The American Village"

undercuts the possibilities of this imagery of renewed life in the apostrophe which closes the tale:

> Farewell lamented pair, and whate'er state
> Now clasps you round, and sinks you deep in fate;
> Whether the fiery kingdom of the sun,
> Or the slow wave of silent Acheron,
> Or Christian's heaven, or planetary sphere,
> Or the third, region of the cloudless air;
> Or if returned to dread nihility,
> You'll still be happy, for you will not be.
> (ll. 376-383)

While the noble savages Caffraro and Colma believe that they will meet again, the narrator does not. We are thus introduced to the poet's consideration of the nature of the afterlife and his realization that we cannot know what awaits us in death. Perhaps his rhetorical arrangement of the alternatives suggests his own feelings on the matter. Thematically, then, the tale of Caffraro and Colma is consistent with the poem's concern with transience, decay, and flux, since, for man, the end of the process is inexorable death. As William L. Andrews points out:

> In the mind of Freneau, the happiness of country life is dependent not only on the ideals of contentment and simple rural virtues but on a spiritual calm that comes only from a primitivistic ignorance of the entire question of eternity. Freneau...did not possess such ignorance.[3]

Andrews goes on to argue that "The American Village" is "a declaration. . .of [Freneau's] imaginative independence."[4] Indeed, "The American Village" reveals that as early as 1772 Freneau had begun to employ the conventions of Neo-Classical poetry in order to question the assumptions underpinning them.

"The House of Night"[5] is one of the most massively revised of Freneau's poems. The original is a work of 73 quatrains, while the '86 version is expanded to 136 quatrains. In 1795, the poem becomes "The Vision of Night. . ." a "fragment" of a mere 21 quatrains. The standard view of "The House of Night" is that it is a remarkable precursor of the gothicism of certain Romantic writers. For example, F. L. Pattee says that the poem's "weird supernaturalism. . .anticipated Scott and. . . its unearthly atmosphere. . .clearly anticipated Coleridge."[6] He further contends that Freneau was "the most conspicuous pioneer in that dim romantic world that was to be explored by Coleridge and Poe."[7] Actually, "The House of Night" may very well be something of an elaborate satire.[8] Freneau's intent may be suggested subtly in the tone of the "advertisement" which preceeds the poem in the '86 version. The reader who is familiar with the poet's attitude toward conventional religion[9] and who has considered the poet's questioning of the nature of the afterlife is struck by the incongruity of the pious stance of the advertisement:

> This Poem is founded upon the authority of Scripture, inasmuch as these sacred books assert, that the last enemy that shall be conquered is Death. . . .It concludes with a few reflexions on the impropriety of a too great attachment to the present life, and incentives to such moral virtue as may assist in conducting us to a better.

As we have seen, Freneau was not at all sure that there is a "better" world to which "moral virtue" can assure us entry.

The body of the advertisement also briefly outlines the plot of "The House of Night." Death "personified" is discovered by the narrator on his dying bed in a solitary palace, "the time midnight." The palace owner, Cleon, "an amiable, majestic youth, who had lately lost a beloved consort," is tending to Death, according to "that divine precept, If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." The youth warns Death of the "certainty of his doom," and Death prepares himself by composing his own epitaph and ordering that it be inscribed on his tombstone, "hinting to us thereby, that even Death and Distress have vanity." Freneau may seriously be attempting to create a didactic tone here, but that he is playing a satiric trick is strongly suggested by the extent to which the advertisement exaggerates the characteristic gothic elements popularly associated with melancholy "graveyard" verse: midnight, the solitary palace, the recent death of the beloved, the certainty of doom, the personification of death. These details are further emphasized by the poem's internal trappings: the opening lines of the poem feature death, night, gloom, and horror.

> Trembling I write my dream, and recollect
> A fearful vision at the midnight hour;
> So late, Death o'er me spread his sable wings,
> painted with fancies of malignant power!
> (St. 1)

> Let others draw from smiling skies their theme,
> And tell of climes that boast unfading light,
> I draw a darker scene, replete with gloom,
> I sing the horrors of the House of Night.
> (St. 3)

Later in the poem we encounter Death's groans and howls, tombstones, a storm, a graveyard, and a coal black chariot. Moreover, the emphasis on the visionary quality of the experience which the poem relates and the speaker's admission that he operates under the influence of fancy--"Fancy, I own thy power"--tend also to exaggerate the gothicism of "The House of Night." (St. 5)

However, while one is reminded of the macabre quality of such works as Blair's "The Grave" or Young's "Night Thoughts," "The House of Night" is neither as restrained, as rationally discursive, nor as sincerely didactic as those works. Rather, Freneau's poem is fanciful and dramatic yet tinged with realistic irony. "The House of Night" is neither the internal musing of its narrator nor a chronicle of the interior of the mind but is rather a confrontation among Death, his host, and the narrator, who is at first only an observer of the action but who quickly becomes involved in it when Cleon asks to be temporarily relieved of his death watch. The romantic melancholy evoked by Cleon's story of Aspasia, his lover who was so beautiful that "even in death [she]/ May seize thy heart" (St. 44), is undercut by the realism of the bickering of the undertaker with Death over the price of the funeral.

> "Yes , said the master workman, noble Death,
> "Your coffin shall be strong--that leave to me--
> "But who shall these your funeral dues discharge?
> "Nor friends nor pence you have, that I can see."
> (St. 91)

The effect of the poem's dramatic quality is to make death more ludicrous: he dies bewailing his fate as some wretch might, groaning "in horror and despair" (St. 117). The realistic element introduced by the undertaker reminds us that death should not be considered always only in philosophical or meditative terms but rather must be dealt with in a crudely practical way. The poem is shorn, then, of the melancholy brooding popularly associated with the graveyard verse which it superficially imitates.[10]

That Freneau is subtly satirizing is further suggested by the names which he chooses for the poem's bereaved lover and his departed lady. Cleon and Aspasia sound like the typical euphonious, Neo-Classical names of tragic lovers. Actually, Cleon was a powerful Athenian politician of the fifth century, B.C., and Aspasia was the courtesan mistress of his arch-rival, Pericles. "The House of Night" depicts Cleon as being the noblest of men in tending to Death "as though [he were] a brother" (St. 35) even though Death has cruelly snatched his consort away. Yet Thucydides reveals Cleon to be a stern, vindictive man. When the Mytilene revolt against Athens was put down in 427 B.C., Cleon proposed that all its citizens be executed and its women and children sold into slavery in the belief that "where vengeance follows most closely upon the wrong it best equals it and most amply requites it."[11] Freneau's Cleon forebears to seek revenge. Likewise, Aspasia hardly seems a likely model for the ideal lover. Although she was the mother of Pericles' illegitimate son and had been tried for impiety shortly before the out-

break of the Peloponnesian war, Freneau's Cleon describes her thusly:

> ". . .The loveliest of her kind,
> Lucretia's virtue, with a Helen's charms,
> Charms of the face and beauties of the mind.
> . . .Each future age her virtues shall extol,
> Nor the just tribute to her worth refuse."
> (Sts.39, 41)

Finally, despite the purported supremacy of fancy throughout "The House of Night," its final five stanzas close the poem on a markedly rational note. Unlike the conventional poets of the graveyard, Freneau refuses to extol the faith of those who believe that

> The illustrious deliverer of mankind
> The Son of God [the grave] foiled.[12]

Rather, Freneau posits the Lucretian notion of a natural immortality. According to Nelson Adkins, Freneau grafts "Christian doctrine on an essentially pagan metaphysic" in "The House of Night."[13] Actually, the poet goes further than that. His conclusion makes no reference to God or to a Christian notion of afterlife for the soul. Lucretius held that the soul disintegrates into its constituent elements even more readily than does the body;[14] Freneau captures just that sense of flux:

> What is this Death, ye deep read sophists, say?-
> Death is no more than one unceasing change;
> New forms arise, while other forms decay,
> Yet all is LIFE throughout creation's range.

133

The towering Alps, the haughty Appenine,
The Andes wrapt in everlasting snow,
The Ap alachian and the Ararat
Sooner or later must to ruin go.

134

Hills sink to plains, and man returns to dust,
That dust supports a reptile or a flower;
Each changeful atom by some other nurs'd
Takes some new form, to perish in an hour.

135

Too nearly join'd to sickness, toils and pains,
(Perhaps for former crimes imprison'd here)
True to itself the immortal soul remains,
And seeks new mansions in the starry sphere.

136

When Nature bids thee from the world retire,
With joy thy lodging leave, a fated guest;
In Paradise, the land of thy desire,
Existing always, always to be blest.

For Freneau, as for Lucretius, death is simply "a fresh arrangement of atoms"[15] which may result in the soul's discovery of the "new mansions" it seeks. "The House of Night" teaches us that death is the "paradise" of the soul's release from "sickness, toils, and pain"; we need not fear death because we shall exist "always" in "each changeful atom" as it "takes some new form."[16] While the final two stanzas of "The House of Night" appear to assert the soul's immortality--"Paradise" and "new mansions" for the "immortal soul"--the context of the poem suggests that these closing lines are intended to be ironic. Stanzas 132 through 134 present a materialist position which contradicts the possibility of any acceptance of the traditional

Christian afterlife which stanzas 135 and 136 appear openly to avow. I believe that Freneau has put on the mask of conventional religious didacticism in order to create a subtle ironic reversal. While the meaning of these five stanzas, taken even in the context of the satiric tone of the revised poem, is ambiguous, Freneau's intent may be suggested by the fact that although he chooses stock terms, lodging and mansions, to describe the body before and after death, he chooses terms which are denotatively materialistic. Moreover, he emphasizes that "Nature bids [us] from the world retire." God is notably absent, as we have seen.

While both "The American Village" and "The House of Night" are concerned with the nature of death, "The Beauties of Santa Cruz"[17] begins to move toward a conception of how to live and introduces the tension between land and sea. Santa Cruz is a type of Eden:

> But, shepherd, haste, and leave behind thee far
> Thy bloody plains, and iron glooms above,
> Quit the cold northern star, and here enjoy,
> Beneath the smiling skies, this land of love.
> (St. 99)

But, significantly, though the island is beautiful and though it offers escape from the "darksome forests" (St. 107) of the north where liberty and tyranny vie for supremacy, this paradise is imperfect. Amidst "sweet orange groves," "cooling acid limes," and "juicy lemons" (St. 34) grows the "poisonous machineel" which bears a tempting "fragrant apple" (St. 31). Thus, even "in Eden's ground" one must guard against that which is not what it appears to be, for though the machineel

is "alluring to the smell, fair to the eye," yet "deadliest poison in [its] taste is found" (St. 32). Furthermore, Santa Cruz harbors "cruel slavery" (St. 79), the murderous concomitant of its sugar trade. "Yonder slave" (St. 72) stands as a mute reminder that the greed of "proud misers" and "lordly despots" (St. 71) for "gold accurst" is a "madness" which has "darken'd" the mind to reason and compassion (St. 73-76) even in what is apparently a natural paradise. Moreover, the temptations of the flesh may seduce the unwary here:

> To sensual souls the clime may fatal prove,
> Anguish and death attend, and pain severe,
> The midnight revel, and licentious love.
>
> Full many a swain, in youth's serenest bloom
> Is borne untimely to this alien clay. . . .
> (Sts. 25-26)

We are thus subtly made aware that in beautiful Santa Cruz lurk elements which may be both physically and spiritually destructive to man.

Life on the island paradise is juxtaposed with life on the "inhospitable main" (St. 89). In spite of its edenic qualities, Santa Cruz is still a part of "Nature":

> These isles, lest nature should have prov'd too kind,
> Or man have sought his happiest heaven below,
> Are torn with mighty winds, fierce hurricanes,
> Nature convuls'd in every shape of woe.
> (St. 80)

The power of the hurricane is so great that the "plantane grove. . .is no more a refuge" (St. 86) but is sundered by wind and sea, as had been the "lovely isle" of "The American Village." Nothing is permanent; there is no "heaven" here below. The speaker of "The Beauties of Santa Cruz" therefore

realizes that he must go forth to sea and confront the experiences he finds there:

> For I must go where the mad pirate roves . . .
> Led by false hope, and expectations vain.
>
> There endless plains deject the wearied eye,
> And hostile winds incessant toil prepare;
> And should loud bellowing storms all art defy,
> The manly heart alone must conquer there.--
> (Sts. 89-90)

The 1786 version of "The Beauties of Santa Cruz" foreshadows such poems as "The Lost Adventurer" which suggest the potential destructive qualities of the land and contrast land and sea in order to establish the necessity to go to sea in order to strip one's self of "false hope and expectation vain." These themes, only dimly suggested in the original version, are developed in 1786.

Nonetheless, in "The Beauties of Santa Cruz," the poet paints a verbal picture which is lush and sensuous, concrete and particular. Critics have praised the poem for the originality of its description,[18] and, in fact, the poem is remarkable in the extent to which it departs from the Neo-Classical tenet extolling "the grandeur of generality."[19]

> Yon' cotton shrubs with bursting knobs behold,
> Their snow white locks these humble groves array;
> On slender trees the blushing coffee hangs
> Like thy fair cherry. . . .
>
> The spicy berry, they guava call,
> Swells in the mountains on a stripling tree. . . .
>
> The smooth white cedar, here, delights the eye,
> The bay-tree, with its aromatic green. . . .
>
> Here mingled vines their downward shadows cast,
> Here, cluster'd grapes from loaded boughs depend. . . .
> (Sts. 43-47)

Contrary to previous interpretations,[20] I would argue that the effect of the rich descriptive passages of "The Beauties of Santa Cruz" is to create a physical lushness which is meant to be seen as containing within itself the seeds of its own destruction. The poisonous fruit and the chaotic hurricanes are the dark underside of visible forms. Likewise, man's nature contains the self-destructive elements of greed and debauchery. Man's nature becomes here a reflection of the nature which is his environment. Ultimately, the comforts of the island, not the least of which is rum, "enchanting juice" and "delicious nectar" (St. 61) of the sugar cane, may rob man of his strength and lead him to destruction. Santa Cruz is as alluring and as potentially destructive as "that shore/Where lotos grew" (St. 62), and from which Ulysses rescued his sailors. Thus, though the speaker of "The Beauties of Santa Cruz" invites the shepherd to join him in these "southern groves" (St. 107), the invitation is tinged with an ambivalence generated by the speaker's awareness that, though Santa Cruz displays "Nature's charms in varied beauty," the island is still ruled by a "tyrannic crown" (St. 97) and her charms may well entice man to acquiesce in that rule. The closing stanza of the poem contrasts the shepherd who remains in the colonies to fight the tyrant and the bard who has, physically at least, escaped the struggle:

> Still there remain--thy native air enjoy,
> Repell the tyrant, who thy peace invades,
> While, pleas'd, I trace the vales of Santa Cruz,
> And sing with rapture her inspiring shades.
> (St. 108)

This final stanza suggests not only Freneau's personal sense of guilt at having sat out part of the Revolution while lolling in the West Indies but, more importantly, his sense that life on land may be cloying and illusive and therefore destructive, since the "tyrannic crown" is worn by both Nature and King George.

Freneau returns to the consideration of the nature of death and explores the relationship between man and nature in "Plato, The Philosopher, To His Friend, Theon."[21] The central issue of the poem is stated in its opening stanza:

> Why, Theon, wouldst thou longer groan
> Beneath a weight of years and woe,
> Thy youth is lost, thy pleasures flown,
> And time proclaims, "Tis time to go."
> (ll. 1-4)

The poem is a monologue directed, as the title states, to Theon by Plato, who functions here simply as a persona which Freneau uses to mask himself. The characters of Plato and Theon are not interwoven into the monologue, and the poet drops the mask in the later editions, titling the poem simply "To An Old Man" and leaving the body of the poem virtually untouched.[22] The speaker's attitude towards death is influenced by his attitude towards old age and towards life in general:

> Constrain'd to dwell with pain and care,
> These dregs of life are bought too dear,
> 'Tis better far to die than bear
> The torments of another year.
> (ll. 17-20)

Death, then, is preferable to the torments of the "dregs of life." The speaker's attitude is underscored by his description

of the inevitable decay of physical nature and leads to his conclusion that "to live is nothing but to grieve" (l. 44):

> A thousand deaths around us grow,
> The frost the tender blossom kills,
> And roses wither as they blow.
>
> Cold nipping winds thy fruits assail,
> The infant apple seeks the ground,
> The peaches fall, the cherries fail,
> The grape receives a fatal wound. . . .
>
> The mountains waste, the shores decay,
> Once purling streams are dead and dry--
> 'Twas nature's work--'tis nature's play,
> And nature says, that all must die.
>
> Yon' flaming lamp, the source of light,
> In chaos dark shall shroud his beam
> And leave the world to mother night,
> A farce, a phantom, or a dream.
>
> (ll. 22-28 and 33-40)

The stark closing evocation of nihility, the insistence on the inevitability of decay in the natural cycle, and, indeed, the very vividness of "cold nipping winds" and "dead. . . dry" streams, constitute a powerful illustration of the "mere emptiness and vanity" (l. 60) with which the poet ironically equates "the grandeur of this earthly round" (l. 56). Consequently, the speaker goes on to suggest his belief that death offers the soul a kind of transformation. If we expect a transformation of the traditional Christian type, however, we are mistaken. "Give me the stars, give me the skies," he cries; "Give me the heaven's remotest sphere" (ll. 61-62). Because the human body is not yearly renewed in the same way that "green eternal crowns the year" (l. 78), the soul seeks release from the body, having grown "weary of [its] mansion here" (l.80).

Ultimately, the speaker states that we must prepare to resign ourselves to Jove, for "his we are" and he "made us mortal" (l. 88). Death, he believes, is "but the freedom of the mind" (l. 86). Death, therefore, is part of the natural process which we are by living forced to undergo, and death is release from the imprisonment of the body. The tone of "Plato. . . to. . .Theon" is pessimistic, and once again we discover the poet's radical departure from the conventional belief that though life is vain and empty, the world to come is better. For the speaker here, the afterlife is hardly the Christian heaven; instead, his desperate "Give me the stars. . ." suggests the conclusion of "The House of Night" that the soul's release from "sickness, toils, and pains" simply frees it to "take some new form." Moreover, the allusion to Jove and the poet's use of the pagan philosopher as a persona remove the speaker's words entirely from the Christian context.

"The Dying Elm,"[23] which had appeared three years before "Plato To Theon," is the first of a series of short, intense lyrics in which the poet employs natural phenomena as symbol. Here concerns which will occupy him for the rest of his life are introduced in the lyric mode. Freneau's awareness of the transience of all natural phenomena, man or plant, is embodied in the elm. By probing the relationship between the elm and the deluded speaker of the poem, he both focuses on man's desire to ignore his own mortality and recognizes the impossibility of so doing. In addition, Freneau raises another question

which he will continue to raise: What is the relationship between appearance and reality? May we allow ourselves to be deluded by the superficial when the truth refuses to remain submerged beneath the surface? The transience of the elm reminds us of something which we would prefer not to know.

"The Dying Elm" is significant also due to the manner in which Freneau revised it. The 1779 poem is a three stanza poem, which becomes lines 1 - 12 and 19 - 24 in the 1786 edition. The '86 edition is a 24 line poem containing no stanza breaks, lines 13 - 18 having been added. Thus, "The Dying Elm" provides an example of the manner in which Freneau revised his lyrics throughout his career and consistently distanced himself from the experiences of the speakers of the respective poems.

> Sweet, lovely Elm, who here dost grow
> Companion of unsocial care,
> Lo! thy dejected branches die
> Amidst this torrid air--
> Smit by the sun or sickly moon,
> Like <u>fainting flowers</u>, that die at noon.
> Thy withering leaves, that drooping hang,
> Presage thine end approaching nigh,
> And lo! thy amber tears distill,
> Attended with that parting sigh--
> O charming tree! no more decline,
> But be thy <u>shades</u> and love-sick whispers mine.
> Forbear to die--this weeping eve
> Shall shed her little drops on you,
> Shall o'er thy sad disaster grieve,
> And wash thy wounds with pearly dew,
> Shall pity you, and pity me,
> And heal the <u>languor</u> of my tree!
> Short is thy life, if thou so soon must fade
> Like angry Jonah's gourd at Nineveh,
> That in a night its bloomy branches spread
> And perish'd with the day.--
> COME, then, revive, sweet lovely Elm, lest I,
> Thro' vehemence of heat, like Jonah, wish to die.

Perhaps the lamentation of the speaker of this poem results from his unwilling realization that he shares the elm's destiny. "Sweet, lovely Elm, who here dost grow," he apostrophizes, establishing the nature of his relationship with the tree by speaking to it and by projecting upon it his own emotional state. The tree is the "companion" of his "unsocial care" and is, like him, "dejected." Apparently, the "torrid air" is the cause--the heat with which the "sun" or the "sickly moon" has "smit" the elm. Like "fainting flowers," the elm's branches may "die at noon," the hottest and brightest time of the day.

In the next six lines of the poem, the speaker's relationship with, and attitude towards, the elm are further clarified: he fears that the tree will die because its "withering leaves, that drooping hang/Presage its end approaching nigh." So intense is the withering heat that the elm's very sap begins to solidify: "Thy amber tears distill/Attended with that parting sigh."

Yet the elm is not simply a shade tree which literally protects the speaker from the intense heat of the sun. The elm is also the classical tree of "false dreams."[24] The tree does not--it cannot--utter a "parting sigh." Only the speaker can. "O charming tree!" he says, "no more decline,/But be thy shades and love-sick whispers mine" (ll. 11-12). Charming suggests that, like Vergil's elm near the gates of Hades, this tree harbors delusion. Charming is not used simply to suggest "lovely" or "attractive," but to convey, subtly, the sense

of "bewitching." Thus, the speaker asks for "love sick whispers" which the tree cannot produce. Instead he must delude himself with the rustling of the wind through the "dejected" branches and "withering," "drooping" leaves. Note that the poet skillfully suggests the rustling of the wind by employing in line 12 a series of sibilant and near-sibilant sounds: "thy shades and love-sick whispers."

The speaker asks also for the elm's "shades." Like charming, shades is double-edged, implying not only protection from the sun's ray--and symbolically from the glaring light of reality--but also the illusory quality of "false dreams" and the visual dimness and obscurity of darkness. These connotations are further underscored by the elm's association, as an underworld tree, with death. Shades thus takes on the meaning linked to the elm's "charms." As we shall see, shades is a loaded word in Freneau's vocabulary--he will employ the word to suggest multiple meanings in such poems as "The Dying Indian," "The Lost Adventurer," and "The Wild Honey Suckle." The shade of the elm protects the speaker not only from heat, but also, significantly, from light.

The speaker continues, his maudlin self-consciousness most obvious in lines 13 through 18. The evening's "pearly dew," like manna from heaven, will allay the desperate condition conveyed here by the medical language employed: the elm's "wounds" will be washed; its "lanquor" thus "heal[ed]." The "eve" is "weeping"; its tears, unlike the elm's own, will preserve life

because "this weeping eve" will "pity" both the elm and the speaker and provide life-giving moisture. However, the "wounds" of the elm and its debilitated condition are caused by natural processes. Thus the degree to which the speaker projects his own emotional state is emphasized. The impulse to deceive does not reside in the elm because the speaker is the wounded and languid one. This passage, added, as we have noted, in the '86 version, shifts the poem's focus from the tree to the speaker and underscores his selfish concern.

The tree can no more "forebear to die" than it can forebear to live. Yet the speaker wishes to cling to the illusive hope that his tree will survive. "Short is thy life, if thou so soon must fade," he says, his emphasis on is. Clearly the speaker wishes for the elm's revival. Nevertheless, he knows that the tree "must fade" even though he apparently does not want to accept the fact. The allusion which follows illustrates both the speaker's awareness and his lack of awareness. The Old Testament book of Jonah recounts that prophet's sojourn in the whale and his subsequent prophecies at Nineveh. Having been warned by Jonah of their approaching damnation, the Ninevites repent of their iniquities and don sackcloth (3:5). Jehovah, seeing this, is pleased and relents. Now he will not destroy the once wicked city (3:10). Jonah, however, becomes "hot with anger" (4:1) and prays to God to take his soul, for now he feels he would be better off dead, having been contradicted, he says, "in an affair of mine, and on my own ground"

(4:2). Of course, Jehovah rightly counters by asking Jonah to consider the justness of his plaint. When Jonah sulks off into the desert, Jehovah causes a bottle gourd plant to grow up over him "to become a shade over his head, to deliver him from his calamitous state" (4:6). Like the speaker of the present poem, Jonah is greatly pleased to have the shade, but the next morning Jehovah sends a "worm" to destroy the plant, and it quickly "drie[s] up" (4:7). A parching east wind comes, and the sun beats down on Jonah until he begins to "swoon" and to ask again that he might die (4:8). Finally, Jehovah asks Jonah if he has "rightly become hot with anger" over the death of the gourd, and Jonah stubbornly replies, "I have rightly become hot with anger, to the point of death" (4:9). But Jehovah responds:

> You, for your part, felt sorry for the. . . gourd. . .which you did not toil upon or make get big, which proved to be a mere growth of a night and perished. . .And for my part, ought I not feel sorry for Nineveh in which there exist one hundred and twenty thousand men. . .?
>
> (4:11)

The point here may be that Jonah is willing his own death in order not to have to face his own limitations. The heat of the searing east wind and the torrid sun are unnecessary, and even without Jehovah's chiding, Jonah's own internal heat is enough to destroy him: so, too, the speaker of the poem, since the "vehemence of heat" to which he refers likewise burns two ways. The "shades" of the elm cannot shield him from the light of truth. He must accept his own nature as well as the elm's.

Both shall, at last, die, like the bottle gourd tree. The final apostrophe of "The Dying Elm" is, then, but one more wishful thought. Were the "sweet, lovely Elm" to revive, the speaker's hopes might be momentarily fed, but he would nonetheless ultimately be forced to face his own death.

Well versed in the classics, Freneau was unquestionably aware of the ancient symbolic association of the tree with life.[26] The oak, the cypress, the pine, as well as the elm, have embodied for different cultures the strength and endurance and fertility which we desire for ourselves. The allusions to Vergil and to the Bible demonstrate that the poet has effectively separated himself from the speaker of the poem and that, therefore, the speaker is a persona whose attitude is being examined by the poet, and hence by the reader, in precisely the same way that the attitude of the prophet is examined by the author of the Book of Jonah as well as by his readers. Indeed, it is arguable that the Bible story exists solely for this purpose, and I submit that the examination of the persona's attitude is a primary concern of the poet as well.

Characteristically, "The Dying Elm" employs language which emphasizes the artist's profound awareness of the dichotomy between that which seems and that which is. Charming, shades, fade imply the illusory quality of the superficial. Moreover, the poem's dominant imagery juxtaposes night, darkness, and shade with the day, light, and heat in order to concretize the clash between the security of ignorant illusion and the difficulty of facing and accepting reality. Shade, evening, and

night contend with heat, noon, and day. Hiding in the outstretched arms of the dying elm, Freneau's persona can no longer hide from himself. Indeed, "The Dying Elm" is so carefully made that even its dominant sounds underscore its theme: the repetition of the sounds of o͞o (who, moon, drooping, dew, you, bloomy, thro') and o͝o (glow, unsocial, approaching, lo, O, no, Jonah) creates the mournful undertone of moaning, keening sounds which is aptly fitting to the persona's pre-occupation with death. Freneau subtitles the poem "An Irregular Ode," alluding to the Neo-Classical form often used to convey strong emotion.

Subsequent poems in which Freneau focuses on specific natural phenomena and plumbs their symbolic implications are the thematic progeny of "The Dying Elm." The poem is significant as the first of the intense, highly personal lyrics which Freneau was to produce, and illustrates the development of the poet's ability to control the emotional stuff of which his poetry is often made and to shape it into controlled imaginative statement. The poet's attention to the poem is evident not only in the careful way he has revised it but also in the craftsmanlike way he has structured it. "The Dying Elm" calls our attention effectively to Freneau's consistent concern with transience and decay, his awareness of the dichotomy between appearance and reality, and his acceptance of the fact that death is both natural and inevitable.

In sum, the effect of the early "The American Village" and of the four later works of the 1786 edition here discussed

is to prepare the reader for the lyric poetry's intense focus on the nature of death, the relationship between man and nature, and the question of how most meaningfully to live.

CHAPTER III: "Without A Partner And Without A Guide": The Poems of Philip Freneau, 1786

We will now turn our attention to the close analysis of five lyric poems which are first collected in the 1786 edition. These poems span the years 1782 to 1786 and illustrate both the development of the poet's thought concerning the issues with which he was deeply involved and the development of certain artistic techniques such as the poet's use of the persona as a mask, the poet's use of concrete specific images, and the poet's use of structural devices such as rime and metre in order to emphasize the point he wishes to convey. The five poems, in order of their first publication, are: "A Moral Thought," "The Dying Indian," "Verses, Made at Sea in a Heavy Gale," "The Vernal Ague," and "Captain Jones' Invitation."

1. The Scene Fantastic: "A Moral Thought"/"The Vanity of Existence"

First published in 1781, "A Moral Thought" provides the key to the reconsideration of the standard critical view of Philip Freneau. First, the poem exemplifies Freneau's ability to employ concrete images and poetic structures effectively. Second, Freneau's revisions reveal not only his growing ability to distance himself but also a conscious reversal of certain Neo-Classical traditions. Third, the poem focuses on a central theme, the nature of the afterlife, by examining the

dichotomy between appearance and reality.

In youth, gay scenes attract our eyes,
And not suspecting their decay
Life's flow'ry fields before us rise,
Regardless of its winter day.

But vain pursuits, and joys as vain,
Convince us life is but a dream.
Death is to wake to rise again
To that true life I best esteem.

So nightly on the flowing tide,
Oft have I seen a raree-show;
Reflected stars on either side,
And glittering moons were seen below.

But when the tide had ebb'd away,
The scene fantastic with it fled.
A bank of mud around me lay,
And sea-weed on the river's bed.

Having often watched the ebbing evening tide, the speaker of "A Moral Thought"[1] ponders its significance. He emphasizes our tendency to accept appearances as the truth when we are young--"In youth gay scenes attract our eyes"--but has clearly reached a point of later maturity which has changed his vision. "Not suspecting" is characteristic of youth, for when we are young and inexperienced we have no inkling that those "gay scenes" are not what they appear to be. In language which reveals its superficiality, the speaker of "A Moral Thought" recollects his earlier perspective, recalling it in order to undercut it. "Gay scenes"--the bright appearances--conveys through its theatrical connotations the sense of artificiality as well as that of shallowness.

Though highly conventional, and at this stage a generalization as yet unsupported by any specific illustration of its meaning, this initial stanza introduces the reader to the tensions which "A Moral Thought" will develop. Winter is juxtaposed

with the delicate picture of spring--"life's flow'ry fields"--perhaps in order to emphasize the cold barrenness of reality. Further, the transience of these scenes is exposed: they "decay" even as our eyes are attracted to them. And even winter lasts only a "day." "Life's flow'ry fields"--the warm, bursting springtime of youth--and "winter day"--the cold, dead terminus of the cycle--establish in their relationship a sense of the flux which characterizes the process which the speaker has undergone as gradually he has apprehended the difference between appearance and reality. Thus the perspective of the speaker is one of detachment: the I narrator has lived and now reflects back upon what life has taught him. His experience of change has markedly changed him. The narrator is now convinced, as he suggests all of "us" must be, that "life is but a dream." "Vain pursuits and joys as vain" teach us that we are surrounded by shams and delusions. Death is the sole avenue to a glimpse of reality, for "death is to wake to rise again," thereby allowing us to shatter the dream and to apprehend "true life."

Stanza two reinforces the tension introduced in stanza one. "Vain pursuits"--hollow, perhaps even foolish--echoes the connotations of "gay scenes," both phrases suggesting the vacuity of life. Yet both imply that we seek some meaning. We are attracted to certain scenes; we pursue some goal, the cleavage between the sought and the realized sharpens our awareness that in the dream of life we attain nothing.

Do we seek, then, the release of death both feared and desired by the persona of "The Dying Elm"? If death is "that true life I best esteem," do I "wish to die"? The narrator blunts this implicit question by choosing to live. He seems to accept the situation and simply provides, in stanzas three and four, a concretization of these abstract issues, a metaphoric illustration of his mature vision. Stanza three embodies, through its light imagery, the very superficiality of the "gay scenes" and "flowery fields" of stanza one, while stanza four re-presents the grim insight which actualizes the disillusionment of stanza two. The realization that "life is but a dream" leads to the apperception of a dark reality.

On the "flowing tide," the narrator sees a "raree-show," a superficially theatrical and therefore false portrayal of reality, the "gay scenes" from a sleazy peep-show. "Reflected stars" and "glittering moons" are the substance of the illusory performance, but they are immediately revealed as insubstantial and inherently gross. For when the "flowing tide" recedes, the "scene fantastic" disappears and the shimmering light gives way to the "bank of mud" and the "sea-weed." Again the shallow is juxtaposed with the depths beneath: the fantasy images are merely distortions, as are all reflected lights, by their actual optic qualities, of the literal sources of the light, the stars and the moon. Depending on the restless tide for its very existence, the shimmering show exists only on the surface. Sea-weed and mud are the substance underpinning "reflected stars" and "glittering moons."

"A Moral Thought" is a system of balances: its very marrow lies in the tension between two modes of seeing. First, the poet produces his general proposition, then he supports it through specific illustration. The scene is no longer what is being seen. Freneau's control of this dialectic of vision is generated in no small sense by the neat pun he makes on scene and seen. These two words are among the few which are repeated in the poem, scene in lines 1 and 14 and seen in lines 10 and 12. The poet consciously employs the past participle seen with the auxiliaries have and were not only to create the homonym which is linked with scene, but also to create anew and to underscore the sense of process and activity which the perfect tense and the progressive mode respectively convey. Because, finally, we have seen that "life is but a dream," our eyes are no longer attracted to "gay scenes" and we see the mud of reality. The two-stanza statement is balanced by the two-stanza illustration. They are linked by the transitional connective so, which establishes their cause and effect relationship. The poet moves from general to specific, from abstract to concrete, from cause to effect in a tightly logical progression.

While this rhetorical arrangement develops in the manner of a formal argument, the clash of symbols reinforces the tension between scene and seen, appearance and reality. Opposites, again, are balanced: spring and winter represent youth and age, and, by extension, innocence and experience, one unsuspecting, the other quite aware. This conflict is supported by the light

motif which suffuses the poem and illuminates our awareness of the two modes of seeing: "Gay scenes," "flowery fields," "raree-show[s]," appear before "our eyes," their empty brightness implicit in the trivial "reflected stars" and "glittering moons." But "vain pursuits" have convinced us that these are mirages, for the tide has ebbed and we see, oozing through our bright false dreams, the dull, dark, eternal mud.

Innocence and experience, appearance and reality are further dichotomized through the poet's manipulation of point of view. The narrator, as noted, is looking back and commenting from the vantage point of experience. The "scene fantastic" is not immediate but distant enough to be clearly understood. Embodied in the "flowing tide" and in the implicit seasonal cycle, the poem's sense of gradual change accentuates the poet's changed awareness and reinforces the reflective tone which is consistent with the speaker's perspective.

"A Moral Thought" closes on a strikingly pessimistic note which the poem's narrator seems willing to accept since death would provide, one assumes, the consolation of true life. However, I believe that the impact of the final vision is to undercut this sense of consolation, and that the revisions which Freneau makes in the 1795 edition suggest a clarification of the narrator's position. Lines 1 through 7 in '95 are unchanged from the original; in line 8 the most significant alteration is made. "That true life I best esteem" becomes "That true life you best esteem." I implies the speaker's belief in some mean-

ingful life after death, one which will perhaps provide an understanding of the nature of that reality which underlies the "gay scenes." On the other hand, you suggests that the speaker himself does not "esteem" the "true life" of death. He may expect the apparently purposeless annihilation which befalls the bottle gourd. Unlike the speaker of "The Dying Elm," however, he seems not to fear that end. At any rate, Freneau clearly intends that us in line 6 be set off against another pronoun; otherwise he would use we here in line 8. I focuses attention on the speaker, singling him out as the proponent of "true life." You conversely removes the speaker from the reader's scrutiny and places the rest of us in the rather conventional position of believing that death is "to rise again," just as "life's flowery fields rise" before us each spring.

Obviously, a shift in attitude has occurred here, one which is further emphasized by the change of title. The original title appears in both the Freeman's Journal and in the '86 poems and seems consistent with the I in line 8, for the speaker's thought that a true life is gained when we "rise again" in death would certainly be "moral" in a conventional religious sense. On the other hand, the final title, "The Vanity of Existence" achieves a broader, more specific, and more pessimistic effect. For the final, stark reality of the poem is the enigmatic mud: the revised title states unambiguously that existence is vain--not life but existence. Thus, while the

second version of the poem is perhaps a bolder statement, the poet has effectively removed himself from the reader's consciousness through the shift from I to you.

A comparison of this poem to the conventional "life is vain" poems of the eighteenth century supports the idea that the poet has consciously chosen in the revised version to speak clearly. When Professor Bowden claims that "these stanzas of realistic description [stanzas 3 and 4] strengthen the originality of the poem but not the poet's moral,"[2] she fails to recognize that the poet advances no conventional "moral." "The Vanity of Existence" has been called Freneau's "most famous 'life is vain' poem"[3] because critics have failed to note Freneau's subtle revisions and to compare the poem to its supposed models. For example, Leary ignores the original poem entirely and reproduces only the 1795 version, identifying it as "A Moral Thought," and noting that it first appears in Freeman's Journal.[4] Despite this inaccuracy, Leary does recognize that "the particularized realism in the last stanza. . . marks Freneau's break with conventionalized literary tradition," but he insists on reading the poem only as an "intense expression of disillusionment"[5] rather than as a remarkably calm and detached representation of the actual experience of that disillusionment. "The Vanity of Existence" is a poem resonant with the acceptance of that experience and constitutes an explicit denial of conventional religious belief. On the other hand, the conventional "life is vain" mode holds out the hope of salvation--"That true life you best esteem." For example,

in his famous "Vanity of Human Wishes" Samuel Johnson argues that,

> . . .petitions yet remain
> Which heav'n may hear, nor deem religion vain,
> Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
> But leave to heav'n the measure and the choice,
> Safe in his power. . . .
> Implore his aide, in his decisions rest,
> Secure whatever he gives, he gives the best.[6]

On the other hand, Freneau is arguing that prayer can hardly avail when all rationally acceptable evidence denies the possibility of such a thing as Dr. Johnson's "heav'n."

Freneau's attempts to exercise control over point of view exemplify, I believe, the careful, artisan-like approach he takes toward his craft. His lyrics often seem intensely personal; yet the reader must wonder whether the speaker of the poem is a persona rather than the poet himself. In searching for a mode of expression which would allow him to achieve distance from his art, Freneau seeks not to abandon the thoughtfulness and introspection which are evident in this poem, but rather to place the conflict, the tension inherent in the clash of appearance and reality, outside of himself that he may better come to grips with it and render his insights the more comprehensible. Therefore, in "The Vanity of Existence," he does not reveal what "I" thinks or believes, but simply reports what "I" has seen. This attitude of calm reporting seems to characterize much of his best work.

The calm attitude of the speaker is conveyed also in the smooth flow of the poem's regular, but not cloying, iambic tetrametre. Flow is achieved, but sing-song averted, through

the poet's sparing use and careful placement of multi-syllabic words like reflected, glittering, fantastic, and by his reliance overall on simple one- and two-syllable terms. The poem is set in four 4-line stanzas which are related to each other by interconnecting words. Stanzas one and two are linked by the co-ordinating conjunction but, which establishes a grammatical contrast reinforcing the discord between unsuspecting innocence and disillusioned experience. The transitional so, as already indicated, establishes the cause and effect relationship between the two halves of the poem and forms the bridge between abstract and concrete. Bracketed by buts in stanzas two and four, the unifying quality of so is underscored. But introduces stanza four, and as in stanza two, emphasizes the dichotomy between appearance and reality. However, while the poem's sentence structure emphasizes the conflicting elements of its theme, the tone and metre stress the narrator's calm awareness of that conflict.

Rime scheme is also used to create a sense of balance in the poem, and to underscore its final image. "The Vanity of Existence" is composed in an alternate line riming sequence--ABAB--in which new end rime sounds appear in each stanza--CDCD/EFEF--until. the last. Here the poet reverts to the long a sound of the first stanza--BGBG--thus drawing the aural structure of the poem into a circle and emphasizing the finality of the terminal stanza. Moreover, linking these sounds, their decay and winter day in stanza one, with ebb'd away and around

me lay in stanza four, connects the significant thematic concepts of the poem. The passage of time and the resultant onset of deterioration are associated: "decay. . .lay" around the narrator once the "tide [has] ebb'd away" and he has been forced to recognize the mud's ugliness.

Two additional revisions tend to sharpen our awareness of the poet's attempts to relate the poem's sound to its sense. In line 9, he replaces "the flowing tide" with "some shallow tide" and in line 10, he makes the "raree-show" a "splendid show." Apparently Freneau intends that the alliterated sibilants create an impression of the hissing motion of the water, and the use of shallow further underscores the superficiality of appearances. Splendid accentuates the light images of the stanza by its reference to splendour; though it does not convey the sordid quality of raree-show, splendid does suggest the emptiness of the reflected light.

"The Vanity of Existence" achieves, then, a carefully organized representation of a complex human truth. An harmonious blending of form and image underscores that harsh truth. Furthermore, the poem is consistent with and expands upon the poet's developing awareness that the accepted beliefs of his age are somehow empty ones.

2. <u>But When did Ghost Return His State to Show?</u>" "The Dying Indian"

"The Dying Indian, Or The Last Words of Shalum" first appeared in 1784, more than two years after the initial publication of "A Moral Thought." Here Freneau continues his consideration of the nature of the afterlife, once again using an approach which is apparently conventional. Freneau puts the poem in the words of Shalum, a type of noble savage,[7] and in the form of an irregular ode.[8]

"On yonder lake I spread the sail no more!
Vigour, and youth, and active days are past--
Relentless demons urge me to that shore
On whose black forests all the dead are cast:
Ye solemn train, prepare the funeral song,
For I must go to shades below,
Where all is strange, and all is new;
Companion to the airy throng,
What solitary streams,
In dull and dreary dreams,
All melancholy, must I rove along!

To what strange lands must Shalum take his way!
Groves of the dead departed mortals trace;
No deer along these gloomy forests stray,
No huntsmen there take pleasure in the chace,
But all are empty unsubstantial shades,
That ramble through those visionary glades;
No spongy fruits from verdant trees depend,
But sickly orchards there
Do fruits as sickly bear,
And apples a consumptive visage shew,
And wither'd hangs the hurtle-berry blue,
Ah me! what mischiefs on the dead attend.

Wandering a stranger to the shores below,
Where shall I brook or real fountain find?
Lazy and sad deluding waters flow--
Such is the picture in my boding mind!
Fine tales, indeed, they tell
Of shades and purling rills,
Where our dead fathers dwell
Beyond the western hills,
But when did ghost return his state to shew;
Or who can promise half the tale is true?

I too must be a fleeting ghost—no more--
None, none but shadows to those mansions go;
I leave my woods, I leave the Huron shore,
For emptier groves below!
Ye charming solitudes,
Ye tall ascending woods,
Ye glassy lakes and prattling streams,
Whose aspect still was sweet,
Whether the sun did greet,
Or the pale moon embrac'd you with his beams--
Adieu to all!
To all that charm'd me where I stray'd,
The winding stream, the dark sequester'd shade;
Adieu all triumphs here!
Adieu the mountain's lofty swell,
Adieu, thou little verdant hill,
And seas, and stars, and skies--farewell,
For some remoter sphere!

Perplex'd with doubts, and tortur'd with despair,
Why so dejected at this hopeless sleep?
Nature at least these ruins may repair,
When death's long dream is o'er, and she forgets to weep;
Some real world once more may be assign'd,
Some new born mansion for the immortal mind!--
Farewell, sweet lake; farewell surrounding woods,
To other groves through midnight glooms I stray,
Beyond the mountains, and beyond the floods,
Beyond the Huron bay!
Prepare the hollow tomb, and place me low,
My trusty bow, and arrows by my side,
The cheerful bottle, and the ven'son store;
For long the journey is that I must go,
Without a partner, and without a guide."

He spoke, and bid the attending mourners weep;
Then clos'd his eyes, and sunk to endless sleep.

"Perplex'd with doubts, and tortur'd with despair," Shalum, the dying Indian, lies patiently awaiting death. His doubt and despair are products not only of his regret at having lost "vigour, and youth, and active days" but also of his realization that he has no knowledge of what awaits him on "that shore/On whose black forests all the dead are cast." There, for him, "all is strange, and all is new," and he will be quite alone to "rove along. . .solitary streams." "To what strange lands must Shalum take his way!" he laments in stanza two. To him, the "groves of the dead" which "departed mortals trace" are the complete opposite of "yonder lake," which is real to him and tangible. On the other hand, the land of the "airy throng" is populated by "unsubstantial shades" and its "gloomy forests" are but "visionary glades." "Sickly orchards" produce the "consumptive" visaged apple and the "wither'd hurtle-berry blue." The "spongy" fruit of "verdant trees" which Shalum fears will be lost to him is juxtaposed with the withered and the consumptive, thus to stress the barrenness of these strange lands. Indeed, in "these gloomy forests" no huntsmen "take pleasure in the chace" for these dead groves harbor "no deer."

As we learn in stanza three, Shalum prefers his own real world, one in which he feels he knows what to expect. As usual, the poet's choice of words is significant. He has, by the first line of stanza three, employed <u>strange</u> twice (ll. 7 and 12), and here uses <u>stranger</u>. The term means for him, I believe,

not merely unusual or unfamiliar, but rather alien or foreign. Shalum seems therefore to fear not simply death but, more importantly, the alienation and separation from the known world which death will bring. This sense of the expected alienation is emphasized further by his asking "where shall. . .a real fountain" be found. For Shalum, the phenomenological world of the living is the real world. The afterlife he expects is one in which "lazy and sad deluding waters flow." "They" tell "fine tales" of that nether world, he knows, "But. . . ."

And of course this but is the puzzlement. "They" do "tell," but who can "promise" that even "half" of what they tell is true? Ironically, any liar or wishful thinker who so desires can make that promise, but Shalum is skeptical. In the original, Freeman's Journal, version, line 33 reads ". . .who can shew that half the tale is true", a reading which stresses the Indian's rationalistic desire to see some concrete proof of the facts regarding those "strange lands." He seeks, recall, a "real" fountain. Promise suggests his desire in a different way since it obviates the need for a scientific demonstration and simply implies only an assurance that something is, or will be, fact. So a promise is merely one more tale "they" tell. No ghost can "return his state to shew" and thus we cannot in life know the "black forests" of death. And if a ghost were to return, he would be only an "empty unsubstantial shade" of equally unsubstantial credibility. Such pictures fill the "boding mind" of the dying Indian.

Finally, in stanza four, Shalum verbalizes what he has known all along, that in order to learn what awaits him in the groves of the dead, he must die: "I too must be a fleeting ghost," he says. This stanza presents the most forceful illustration of Shalum's allegiance to the phenomenological universe; the "unsubstantial" character of the "visionary glades" and "deluding waters" of the "groves of the dead" is contrasted to the exuberant concreteness and solidity of the world he must leave. The woods are "tall" and "ascending," the lakes "glassy," the streams "prattling" and "winding"; the shade is "dark" and "sequester'd," the hill "little" and "verdant"; the mountain is a "lofty swell." These are not the qualities of the "emptier groves below"; the "aspect" of Shalum's world is "sweet" whether it is embraced by the "pale moon[s]" beams or lit by the sun.

Nonetheless, while Shalum clearly feels secure among the "seas, and stars, and skies" of his own sphere, the language which the poet puts in his mouth suggests his close similarity to personae whom we have already met. First, it must be understood that in "The Dying Indian" Freneau is using the character of Shalum as a kind of mask. This rather conventional device allows the poet to raise questions about the nature of the afterlife without openly acknowledging them as his own. He asks, as before, "what lies beyond the surface?" Here he speaks more plainly in posing the dilemma than perhaps he does in "The Dying Elm," for example, yet here he speaks far less openly. The honesty of his questioning may be in inverse proportion

to the opacity of his mask. An Indian can wonder about things that even a nominal Christian cannot.

Therefore, when Shalum alludes to shades in the sense of spirits, and later to shade in the sense of an area where light is diminished by its interception by some opaque object, we recall the persona of "The Dying Elm"--he is also concerned about his impending loss of the "real" world. Like the elm, the "aspect" of this world is "charming," suggesting that it too is delusive. Shalum implies that "all" of the phenomena he lists have "charm'd" him. Freneau causes him to use the term twice in 8 lines, thus emphasizing its implications. Although this world is more "real" than the "strange world," it too is unreal. The sense of its superficiality is felt in the adjectives which qualify the concrete objects in Shalum's catalogue: "glassy" lakes suggests the reflected light which the tides in "The Vanity of Existence" have shown us is illusory; "prattling" streams implies a meaningless, empty chatter of sound; the "shade" is "dark" and "sequester'd," thus producing dimness and obscurity; even the embracing moon's beams emanate from a "pale" source. Considerably vivid though these passages are in conveying the literal sense of a real, objective world, they are nonetheless connotatively ambiguous. On the one hand, Freneau seems to be working toward a control of concrete visual and aural images, while on the other, he undercuts their solidity by stating them ambiguously. He seems to question the existence of any kind of reality. Shalum's "real" world is at best a superficial one.

That Freneau is masking himself becomes more clear when, in the 1809 edition, he eliminates the poem's entire subtitle and recasts the title as "The Dying Indian, Tomo Cheequi." "Tomo Cheeki" was the mask he had used in a series of essays, "Tomo Cheeki, The Creek Indian in Philadelphia" in 1795. In the series, Tomo Cheeki is an Indian loner--sober, solitary, aloof. He is restrained and insightful--especially into the foibles of the white man. Among other things, he marvels at the white man's egoism in thinking that he understands the laws of nature.[10] Tomo Cheequi's presence here sharpens our awareness that the poet is attempting to attain detachment from the emotional context of the poem.

While "Tomo-Cheeki" is a clear-eyed commonsensical commentator and observer, "Tomo-Chequi" is "perplex'd with doubts. . ., tortured with despair. . ., [and] dejected at [the] hopeless sleep" he faces. Yet he clings to a hope of ressurection, as we see in the final stanza.

Perhaps the dying Indian half-believes that nature will "repair" his "ruins" and "assign" "some new born mansion for the immortal mind," but his language reveals the profundity of his doubt. Perhaps the mind is immortal, and perhaps the body will be reborn. Nature "<u>may</u>" repair, and some real world "<u>may</u>" once more be provided. Yet the use of these conditionals undercuts the possibilities for which Shalum-Chequi hopes. He seems aware that the chance is slim because his last words reiterate his understanding of the difference between the world

he leaves and the world he will enter: He will "stray" to "other groves, through midnight glooms. . .beyond the mountains and beyond the floods." Moreover, he realizes that he will go a long way alone: "/ong the journey is that I must go/Without a partner, and without a guide."

So ends Shalum-Chequi's monologue. The warrior warily faces the unknown, his "trusty bow, and arrows by [his] side," and a "cheerful bottle and the ven'son store," but nothing and no one else. However, the Indian's faint hope is not shared by the narrator, who closes the poem with an heroic couplet which both heightens the Indian's stoic and courageous attitude and seals his fate:

> He spoke, and bid the attending mourners weep;
> Then clos'd his eyes and sank to endless sleep.

Neither death's nor fate's "long dream" will end for Shalum-Chequi: his sleep is "endless." Any wishful thought of "new born mansions" is effectively quashed by this closing couplet.

The relationship between the Indian and the poet is further clarified by this conclusion. The five stanzas of the poem are enclosed by quotation marks, indicating that the Indian speaks directly to the "solemn train" attending him, and to us. We find, when we reach the end of the poem, that the words of Shalum-Chequi are being reported to us by an observer who seems to stand apart, since he does not include himself among the "attending mourners." The effect of this layering of points of view is further to detach the poet from the dying Indian. Shalum/Tomo Chequi emerges as a created character ✓

addressing the entourage bearing his bier. In him, the poet may raise and examine issues through the filter of an intervening consciousness and thereby deal with them both objectively and anonymously. Furthermore, the Indian is himself detached, and talks about himself, at times, as though he is talking about someone else. For example, at line 12 he refers to himself in the third person. At line 52 he asks himself a question and at line 53 refers to his body as "these ruins," as though it were someone's old house. In sum, the effect is that of calm consideration of the problem.

On the other hand, Freneau seems to have had little notion of achieving a sense of verisimilitude in this poem. What Indian could be expected to intone such a line as "Ah me! what mischiefs on the dead attend?" Or "Adieu, thou little verdant hill?" Still, even though Shalum-Chequi wouldn't really have sounded like this, the poem does achieve something of a conversational tone through its varied metre and its stanza structure. "The Dying Indian" seems to be modeled on the irregular ode form which was popular during the eighteenth century. Like the irregular ode, this poem employs irregular lines and metre in order to convey emotional intensity. For example, stanza one is composed of 11 lines, the first 5 containing 10 syllables; the next 3 containing 8 syllables; the next 2 containing 6 syllables; the last containing 10 syllables again. The shortest lines are indented. The metre is generally iambic, the rhythm of natural speech, but since the lines vary in length, the metre does not become monotonous. The shortest

lines tend to flow quickly and to pick up the tempo: in fact, the series of four 6 syllable lines in stanza three (ll. 28-31) leads with great effect into the closing couplet of that stanza, the couplet which specifically raises the central question in the poem. Of the five stanzas of the warrior's speech, only the last is metrically very regular. Stanza five contains 15 lines, 13 of which are iambic pentameter varied only by the opening troches of lines 53 and 54. This pattern has the effect of retarding the pattern of the poem's final movement so that its measure, though still appropriate to speech, becomes stately and dirge-like.

"The Dying Indian" does not employ a rigid end-rime system either. An insistent repetitive pattern would detract as much from the effect of the dying warrior's words as would an obtrusive metre. The semblance of natural speech is maintained. However, certain sounds are repeated from stanza to stanza in order to interconnect certain concepts. For example, the long oo sound is repeated in new (l. 7), shew/blue (ll. 21-22), and shew/true (ll. 32-33), thus connecting stanzas one, two, and three, and relating specific concepts: Shalum-Chequi believes that all is "strange and new" in the "groves of the dead" where apples "a consumptive visage shew" and "wither'd hangs the hurtle-berry blue," but, he asks, when did "ghost return his state to shew/or who can promise half the tale is true?" Rimes such as the repetition of long o in below (ll. 6, 24, 37), flow (l. 26), go (ll. 35, 64), and low (l. 61) tend also to

unify the poem aurally, and to underscore its mournful tone. Again, the ode model is appropriate here, in that the irregular ode did not employ regularized rime scheme.

Like "The Dying Elm," another of Freneau's "irregular odes," "The Dying Indian" is filled with the sounds of o̲ and oo̲, which here convey the keening of the dying Indian's weeping train. Another interesting rime is the repetition of sleep/weep, which are paired twice (ll. 52-54 and 60-67, respectively) and emphasize, like the repetition of below, the nature of Shalum-Chequi's trip.

"The Dying Indian," in its varied, conversational metre, and reticent yet significant rimes, is effectively unified. The situation which the poem creates seems actual enough, even though we realize that an Indian would hardly have spoken as this one does. If Shalum-Chequi sometimes sounds like a Shaftesburyan Deist suffering from second thoughts, he is nevertheless on the whole convincing. He simply wants concrete evidence as underpinning for his belief. Furthermore, the poet's control of point of view distinguishes the poem. Note that, throughout, the dying warrior calls attention to himself. I is repeated no fewer than ten times in the poem, three times in the first stanza alone. Yet the speaker of the poem does not seem self-conscious. He is simply wondering out loud, and, because he is an Indian, we expect him to be the stoical, noble savage. By contrast, the speaker of "The Dying Elm" seems very self-conscious, despite the fact that the poet allows him to

refer to himself only four times, and only once as I, in the poem's next to last line. In effect, Freneau has achieved the distance here that he struggled to achieve in the earlier poem.

If "The Vanity of Existence" illustrates one aspect of Freneau's developing craftsmanship, his ability to employ direct yet allusive language in the creation of direct yet allusive images, "The Dying Indian" illustrates his ability to remove himself apart from emotionally charged issues. The shift embodied in the revision of "The Dying Elm" and the recasting of "A Moral Thought" to "The Vanity of Existence" seems to me to be implicit in the attitude of the narrator of "The Dying Indian," who reports only what he sees and hears. The poet's only comment on the issue raised in the poem is the poem itself.

We are left, finally, with the awareness that neither the "seas. . .stars, and skies" of the land of the "Huron Bay" nor the "unsubstantial shades" of the "groves of the dead" are real. Both are illusive. If neither dimension of existence is a "true life," what is?

3. And Ruin Is the Lot Of All: "Verses Made At Sea In a Heavy Gale" "The Hurricane"

Since "ghost" cannot "return" the "state" of the invisible world "to shew," and the "bank of mud" and "seaweed" are the underpinnings of the visible world, Freneau in the 1785

"Verses Made At Sea, In A Heavy Gale"[11] continues to examine this perplexity by employing the sea in a sophisticated symbolic context. The opening stanzas establish a contrast which is implied by, but not crystalized in, the earlier "Vanity of Existence." The shore is a haven, while the sea is "the dark abyss," an "unsettled ocean" where chaos reigns. The speaker of the poem is at the mercy of the storm: he would, if he could, reach the safety of shore and home, but forces quite beyond his control buffet him about.

Juxtaposed against the sailor's wretchedness is the security not only of the landsman but also of the birds, the squirrels, and the wolves of the forests, who are "blest" with the safety of land and the "tufted groves." The speaker's danger is heightened by the "feeble" condition of the barque, by the fact that the tempest's "roar" falls "doubly" upon it, and by the concern that the sun may have set for the last time.

> Happy the man who, safe on shore,
> Now trims, at home, his evening fire;
> Unmov'd, he hears the tempests roar,
> That on the tufted groves expire:
> Alas! on us they doubly fall,
> Our feeble barque must bear them all.
>
> Now to their haunts the birds retreat,
> The squirrel seeks his hollow tree,
> Wolves in their shaded caverns meet,
> All, all are blest but wretched we--
> Foredoom'd a stranger to repose,
> No rest the unsettled ocean knows.
>
> While o'er the dark abyss we roam,
> Perhaps, whate'er the pilots say,
> We saw the Sun descend in gloom,
> No more to see his rising ray,
> But bury'd low, by far too deep,
> On coral beds, unpitied, sleep!

But what a strange, uncoasted strand
Is that, where death permits no day--
No charts have we to mark that land,
No compass to direct that way--
   What pilot shall explore that realm,
   What new Columbus take the helm.

While death and darkness both surround,
And tempests rage with lawless power,
Of friendship's voice I hear no sound,
No comfort in this dreadful hour--
   What friendship can in tempest be,
   What comfort on this angry sea?

The barque, accustom'd to obey,
No more the trembling pilot's guide,
Alone she gropes her trackless way,
While mountains burst on either side--
   Thus, skill and science both must fall,
   And ruin is the lot of all.

Stanzas one through three not only establish the symbolic contrast between land and sea but also suggest the ambiguous relationship between the speaker and the sea. For example, the "unsettled ocean" is "foredoom'd a stranger to repose," but the participle foredoom'd follows we and appears to modify the pronoun until the reader arrives at its object, a stranger, which is singular. We is linked by the dash to foredoom'd, so that by implication we, too, are foredoomed: both sailors and the sea are fated never to rest. A more obvious ambiguity exists in the relationship of "we saw the sun descend" to "bury'd low. . .unpitied, sleep." The participial phrases modify we, but, again, are positioned more closely to another substantive, sun, so that by implication both the sailors and the sun will be buried on "coral beds."

The ambiguity of these syntactical relationships is underscored by a subtle undercutting of the sense of security estab-

lished in stanza one and developed in stanza two. The man "trims, at home, his evening fire" and hears "unmoved" the blasts of roar[ing]" wind as they "expire" on the "tufted groves." These closely packed trees surrounding his house seem to provide additional shelter as the man's home becomes a warm, well lit, sanctuary. Even the animals are blest. Yet their sanctuaries are not warm and well lit. The birds "retreat" to "haunts"--why not to "nests?" The "squirrel seeks" a hollow tree --hollow receives the penultimate stress of the line but would seem innocent of any connotations without the context of haunts and its own suggestion of emptiness. Note that the two words are linked alliteratively. The wolves meet in "shaded caverns." Taken singularly, these terms are innocuous, but in that their connotations of darkness and emptiness are contrasted with the secure warmth and light of home and linked with the "dark abyss," the reader must surely wonder if the man on shore is necessarily happy. Indeed, he may well be happy simply because he is deluded by his own ignorance. Protected by the "tufted groves" where beasts seek out "haunts," "shaded caverns," and "hollow trees," he is not forced to confront the elemental chaos of the gale. His home is his own shaded haunt. His happiness is his own hollow tree.

The first three stanzas of "Verses Made At Sea. . ." then, through the density of their syntactical relationships, and their connotative ambiguity, convey a sense of the complexity of the problem they attempt to probe. Is man "safe on shore?"

From what is he safe? Are "all. . .blest but wretched we?" Understood in all of this is the central issue: what, in fact, does the sea hide? What can man discover by penetrating its surface? Is he safe and happy if he is unable or unwilling to attempt this penetration?

These implicit questions become explicit in stanza four when we realize that the poet is using man's struggles on the enigmatic seas to represent his attempts to understand death. Death is "a strange uncoasted strand," never explored; no charts or compass can lead us there. Note that the perspective here is consistent with that of "The Dying Indian"--the foreign land is strange, and we go there alone. Only the incomprehensible tossings of the sea of experience can take us there, and once there we can never return our "state to shew." The questionable security of the land, the safe haven, is juxtaposed, then, not only with the chaos of the awesome sea, but with the peril of the dark, mysterious land to which the hurricane could drive us. "Safe" men do not risk the perils of exploration and are therefore unlikely to experience the chilling insights of "The Vanity of Existence" or of this poem. However, those who go to sea, that is, those who venture out and seek to confront life, storms or no, will find that they are forced to face the unknown, whether or not they want to do so.

And they must face the enigma without charts or compass. For "when did ghost return?" There is no pilot, no "new Columbus" who can lead us there. We go "without a partner and without a guide." Significantly, the poet shifts in stanza

five to the singular first person pronoun I in order to emphasize the isolation of his speaker. Previously, we has been used to indicate that men face a common problem. The shift here underscores Freneau's awareness that the ultimate tempest must and will be faced alone. "While death and darkness. . . surround" us, and "tempests rage," we will not hear "friendship's voice" or receive its "comfort." I believe that this shift of voice has two meanings. It suggests,in a crisis situation, both that the individual human being must face the trial alone to prove his individual worth, and that he may be forced to face it alone because he may find himself deserted or betrayed. In either case, no comforts or friendship will be found. Isolation, whether the product of our own need to be independent, or that of the defection of our comrades, is inevitable. This is a major reason why the personae of "The Dying Elm," "The Vanity of Existence," and "The Dying Indian," and indeed, of all of Freneau's lyrics, are so alone. "Friendship's voice" is mute.

In the final stanza, the persona's vision degenerates to one of horror. Now the issue is out of control; the "trembling pilot" no longer "guides" the barque. "Trackless," she gropes as "mountains burst." Facing his fate alone, ignorant man must reconcile himself to losing everything. "While mountains burst," for example, conveys far more strongly the total loss of the physical world than does the dying Indian's stoical commentary. The pilot-less barque suggests the lack of control

we experience. This final stanza is stated strongly in terms of specific example and general statement--just as the barque gropes alone and no longer obeys the pilot's hand, "thus" must "skill and science both. . .fall."

Yet these final lines are conditional. "Ruin is the lot of all" if the barque refuses to obey the "trembling pilot's guide." Were the barque under control, ruin could possibly be averted. Here Freneau suggests several levels of meaning. On one, he examines the contrasting safety of the land and danger of the sea; on another, he suggests that we must seek the danger and confront it in order to be able to function in its presence.

Freneau calls our attention to his grim vision not only by the foreboding quality of his imagery, but also by his manipulation of structure. In this work he maintains a rigorously regular riming and metrical pattern throughout and employs the repetition of key rimes and the variation of syllabic patterns to create the desired effect. The final stanza, of course, receives our fullest attention. All six stanzas contain six octo-syllabic lines, the first four rimed alternately, the last two in couplets--ABABCC. In stanza four, Freneau initiates an incremental repetition of end rime sounds which builds through stanza five and crescendoes in stanza six. Stanzas three and four are linked by the repetition of long a in say/ray and day/way (ll. 14-16 and 20-22). Stanzas two and

five are next linked by the repetition of long e in tree/we and be/sea (ll. 8-10 and 29-30), the latter rimes being the first couplet rimes that are repetitions. Stanzas three, four, and six are linked by a second repetition of long a: obey/way (ll. 31-33), the latter the first exact repetition of a specific rime word. Stanzas one and six are linked by the precise repetition in the closing couplet of the opening couplet rime, fall/all (ll. 5-6 and 35-36). The effect produced is a kind of cumulative interlocking pattern which interweaves the poem's sound structure progressively from the centre: stanzas three and four are linked; stanzas two and five are linked; stanzas six, four, and three are linked; stanzas six and one are linked. Thus the poem is unified aurally and central concepts are linked while a sense of finality is achieved most effectively in the final couplet. Death "permits no day"--death is at the end of the "trackless way." Tempests on us "doubly fall/our feeble barque must bear them all" or else "skill and science both must fall/ and ruin is the lot of all."

We should note, too, that the last line of the poem is rythmically its most abrupt. Each stanza ends with an indented couplet, so that each stanza ends emphatically. The last lines in the first five stanzas of "Verses Made At Sea. . . ." however, tend to be cluttered. For example, the alliteration in line 6 retards its movement--"our feeble barque must bear them all"--as does the punctuation in line 18, "On coral beds, unpitied, sleep." Line 12 is interrupted by the intrusion of an anapest

into the midst of a line of iambs, and requires elision in order to be read smoothly: "No rest [th'unsettled] ocean knows." Lines 24 and 30 are relatively uncluttered but the former contains one 3-syllable word (Columbus), and the latter two 2-syllable words (comfort, angry). Line 36 flows smoothly, crisply, and swiftly, its initial and final consonants and vowels blending easily and strengthening its impact--"And ruin is the lot of all."

"Verses Made At Sea In A Heavy Gale," which is retitled "The Hurricane" for the edition of 1795, is notable among the poems we have examined so far because Freneau leaves it virtually untouched after having first published it in the Freeman's Journal. The '86 version is identical, in fact, with the original except for minor punctuation emendations. The '95 and '09 editions use the new title and make only a few minor verbal changes. For example, line 30 is revised, "angry sea" becoming first "troubled sea" in '95 and then "raging sea" in '09. All three adjectives tend to personify the sea's chaotic state, but the final one seems to do so most emphatically. Moreover, raging refers to "raging tempests" earlier in the stanza, giving stanza five a neatly balanced couplet which reiterates friendships, comfort, and raging for emphasis. While the revisions made here seem minor, they reveal the poet's implicit conception of the poem as a dynamic process of attempting to understand rather than simply a static frieze of some situation or another.

Once more the poet has wrought a striking vision through his control both of imagery and metaphor and of structure.

The central issue of appearance and reality is being probed, and the focus of this probing centers on the nature of death rather than simply the nature of external phenomena. The speaker does not lament his loss of security, or the loss of his youthful vision, or even his impending death, but seems to accept the inevitability of these losses and to seek a touchstone by which to deal with the uncertainty around him. Literally, going to sea is the activity that gives meaning to life of the persona of "The Hurricane." Figuratively, going to sea becomes the activity of seeking to understand which infuses the poet's being with significance. Ruin is the lot only of those who suppose themselves to be "safe on shore."

4. When Vernal Suns Forbear to Roll: "The Vernal Ague"

First published in the 1786 edition, "The Vernal Ague"[12] examines the theme of the nature of appearance and reality which is central in "The Vanity of Existence." Like the narrator of "The Dying Elm," the narrator of "The Vernal Ague" would prefer

not to know what he knows. Like the narrator of "The Vanity of Existence," he has glimpsed the void.

> Where the Blackbird roosts at night,
> In groves of half distinguish'd light,
> Where the evening breezes sigh
> Solitary, there st ay I.
>
> Close along the shaded stream,
> Source of many a golden dream,
> Where branchy cedars dim the day--
> There I muse, and there I stray.
>
> Yet what can please amid this bower,
> That charm'd my eyes for many an hour!
> The budding leaf is lost to me,
> And dead the bloom on every tree,
>
> The winding stream that glides along,
> The lark that tunes her early song,
> The mountain's brow, the sloping vale,
> The murmuring of the western gale,
>
> Have lost their charms!--the blooms are gone!
> Trees put a darker aspect on,
> The stream disgusts that wanders by,
> And every zephyr brings a sigh.
>
> Great guardian of our feeble kind,
> Restoring Nature, lend thine aid,
> And o'er the features of the mind
> Renew these colours, that must fade,
> When vernal suns forbear to roll,
> And endless winter chills the soul.

Alone, the victim of the vernal ague wanders a landscape "where the Blackbird roosts at night" and "where the evening breezes sigh." His isolation and the degree to which his vision is obscured are emphasized by the phrase which locates both the blackbird and himself: "in groves of half-distinguish'd light." In the 1809 edition, this line becomes "lonely, drowsy, out of sight," emphasizing the speaker's isolation and lethargy. The grammatical ambiguity of these dangling modifiers seems to under-

score the speaker's own confusion. Though he "stays" where "evening breezes sigh," he "strays" the landscape in a seemingly aimless manner. We notice too that the time of day, the sighing of the evening breeze, and the presence of the ominous blackbird generate a sense of melancholy which is juxtaposed with the time of year. Spring is normally the season of joy in new life. The sense of ambivalence thus achieved is the product not only of the speaker's behavior and choice of words but also of the syntactical ambiguity of those words.

Significant also in the opening stanzas of "The Vernal Ague" is the insistent imagery of darkness and obscurity. The time is evening; the local bird is black; the stream is "shaded"; indeed, this is a place which is "dim" even during the day, due to "branchy cedars." The almost total absence of light creates a setting in which the narrator wanders, aimless and listless, because he can see neither literally nor figuratively.

He strays "close along the shaded stream" that was once the "source of many a golden dream." Now, however, the musing speaker is incapable of regaining that golden vision. Golden suggests, of course, a brightness in contrast with the dim surroundings. In 1809, Freneau replaces "golden" with "youthful," in order to establish the sense of time and change on which the significance of the poem depends. As we grow older we realize that the youthful dream is merely the innocent's illusion. Now, later, "What can please amid this bower?" asks the speaker, for he is finally aware that what had once "charm'd [his] eyes

for many an hour" is not what it seemed. In this grove, "the budding leaf is lost" to him and "the bloom on every tree" is dead. In short, the speaker is no longer deceived by superficial appearances. He has penetrated the surface of phenomena and recognized the transience of natural beauty, and, indeed, of natural existence.

Yet one would expect that the proper setting for melancholy musing would be colourless and motionless, fixed and dead. Looking around himself, the speaker catalogues his surroundings: "The. . .stream. . .the lark. . .the mountain's brow, the sloping vale. . .the western gale"--and asserts that all of these "have lost their charms." Although the setting is less vivid than that presented in "The Argonaut," it is far from dead. For example, the poet employs verbals to convey the dynamism of the scene: the stream is "winding," the vale "sloping," the gale "murmuring." Moreover, the verbs in this stanza are active: glides and tunes. The setting is fixed and dead only to the narrator; the fact that it lacks colour for him only, because he projects his own melancholy upon it, heightens our awareness of his projection. Charms and charm'd emphasize by their recurrence the concept introduced by dreams that which we see is not necessarily that which is real. But whence the powers which delude? We wonder whether they are in the perceiver or the perceived. That the speaker is aware of the dichotomy between appearance and reality is further suggested by his next observation. "Trees put a darker

aspect on," he says, the word aspect underscoring the superficiality of appearances. That this "aspect" is darker is not, however, the result of some volition on the part of the trees, but rather of the speaker's self-conscious projection. He states that the stream "disgusts" and that "every zephyr brings a sigh" and thereby implicitly establishes his own interaction with the scene. The stream is not itself disgusting nor disgusted, but rather it disgusts him. So too with the zephyr, which may sound to him like a sigh but does not itself sigh.

Yet he believes that there is an impulse in nature which can alter his perceptions of the world. The final stanza opens with an apostrophe,

> Great guardian of our feeble kind,
> Restoring Nature, lend thine aid,

calling on nature to "renew [those] colours. . .o'er the features of the mind" whose loss the speaker laments. He seeks this renewal fully aware that these colours will again "fade"

> When vernal suns forbear to roll,
> And endless winter chills the soul.

Freneau calls attention to the grim insight of this final stanza not only through its stark imagery but also by his manipulation of the stanzaic structure and rime scheme of the poem. The first five stanzas of the poem each contain four lines, rimed in couplets. This pattern is consistent throughout, each third line introducing a new rime until we reach the final two lines of stanza five where the BB rime of stanza one is repeated, sigh/I, by/sigh, signalling the shift which occurs

in stanza six. Here the poet utilizes alternate line rimes in the first four lines and then reverts to the couplet rime for the two final lines of the poem. Thus stanza six is the only six-line stanza in "The Vernal Ague" and is further set off by its interruption of the established rime pattern of the poem. The return to the couplet rime not only gives the last two lines, which are the only two indented lines of the poem, a sense of harsh finality but also heightens the effect of their imagery of cold and dark. "Vernal suns" are juxtaposed with "endless winter" to the melancholy toll of the long o rime, roll/soul. These lines, like endless winter, chill the soul indeed.

Freneau calls attention to the concluding stanza because it contains the key to the poem. The point is that the ague victim would prefer to be deluded and to retain his youthful dream. Unlike the narrator of "The Vanity of Existence," he is unable, or at least unwilling, to accept the reality of his world. The "shaded stream. . .where branchy cedars dim the day" is an illusory world, one where vision is bedimmed, but it is preferable to his present vision of "dead the bloom on every tree," for this perception generates the speaker's awful awareness of endless winter's chill. The final stanza, then, is the speaker's plea to nature that he be deluded. The terrible irony here is that the youthful view is gone--"the budding leaf is lost to me," says he--and can never be regained.

The painting imagery of the final stanza underscores our awareness that the ague victim consciously seeks to be deluded.

As we have seen, he calls upon "Restoring nature" to "renew. . .o'er the features of the mind. . .these colours that must fade," disregarding his awareness that they must eventually fade. Paradoxically, he asks that Nature alter his perceptions rather than her own appearance. He indicates that delusion lies within the subject's ability to apprehend phenomena rather than within the existence of objects themselves. That is, appearances are not deceiving because natural phenomena desire to deceive, but rather because men do not always understand, or want to understand, what they see. Nature does not cause melancholy; the speaker's psychic condition is the result of his understanding of the nature of reality. Nature simply exists; yet Nature can restore him somehow, he thinks. That this thought is a misconception is stressed by the poem's subtle motif of sight. The only repeated end rimes in the poem share the sound of long *i*. The key rime among these is *I* in line four. *I* is repeated twice in line 8. Then in line 10 the phrase "my eyes" occurs. This term is revised to "the eye" in the final version of the poem, perhaps to link it more strongly with *I*. The resultant association suggests the interrelationship between perception and the self. The eye and the I, the perception and the "features of the mind," determine what one sees.

The paradox deepens through the juxtapositions which create the poem's central tensions. Even the fact that spring has come does not give the ague victim cause for joy. The chill

he feels seems to have been occasioned by the arrival of spring, and warmth. His vision of death--"endless winter"--is sharpened for us by its proximity to the new life of spring. The ague, of course, is a kind of premonition of that endless chill. Ironically, we may infer that the onset of spring has caused the speaker's dreadful vision. Perhaps the sudden fecundity of the world around him reminds him of its inescapable brevity. Now things bloom; later they die. Of course, the speaker is made aware of his own transience by that of the phenomena he moves among. "Dead the bloom on every tree" conveys forcefully the paradoxical sense of death in life which the victim of the vernal ague longs to shake off with the aid of "Restoring Nature." Nature restores, however, only some of her children, he knows, and among them no men: time moves inexorably on. Indeed, the petitioner recognizes the futility of his request: those "colours must fade" in the end. The speaker is fooling only himself. Once we recognize that what we see is not what it appears to be, we can never again accept appearances as realities. Perhaps the speaker's chill is the result of his inability to accept this fact or the possibility that there may be no knowable reality.

The tone and stance of "The Vernal Ague" suggest its kinship with "The Vanity of Existence." The similarities of theme are clear, and both narrators seem to understand their perceptions well and to have their emotions under restraint. However, the crucial difference may lie in their respective distances

from the experiences they report. Not only is the ague sufferer among the phenomena he describes, but he is experiencing them in the present time. While this poem is in the present tense, "The Vanity of Existence" recreates past experience now recollected and comprehended, and its narrator stands outside of the phenomenon he describes. Both recognize implicitly the impossibility of regaining that lost vision; the speaker of "The Vernal Ague," however, seeks paradoxically to do just that. The revision of golden to youthful perhaps best suggests "Ague's" similarity to "Vanity." Both poems are about the development of experience out of innocence through the gradual apprehension of the cleavage between appearance and reality. One laments the loss of the youthful "golden dream," while the other does not. Both vividly concretize the experience of disillusionment and vividly realize a stark reality.

"The Vernal Ague" holds out no hope for the future; there is no sense here that the budding season is explicit proof of God's goodness and wisdom revealed in his handiwork, such as we might find in Thomson's Spring. "Renewing Nature" renews only certain phenomena, and these die quickly enough. Perhaps the conventional wisdom is to extrapolate belief in an afterlife, a rebirth, from the seasonal cycle. Freneau does no such thing: rather he conveys a sense of annihilation--endless winter follows spring and the poem is charged with that grim reality.

6. Learn What It Is To Go To Sea: "Captain Jones' Invitation"

The narrator of "The Hurricane" goes to sea aware of the potential for destruction he will face: he gropes a "trackless way/While mountains burst on either side." Perhaps some part of the reason why he does so may be discovered in "The Invitation,"[13] which was first published in the 1786 edition. The narrator of "The Hurricane" appears to need to "learn what it is to go to sea," an opportunity which "The Invitation" offers. The original title of this piece is "Captain Jones' Invitation," so the poem may appear to be simply "a plea to all brave men who seek honor or wealth in the service of their country."[14] Freneau was aware in 1786 that his reputation as "Poet of The Revolution" was waxing, and, of course, the popularity of his first collected volume might be enhanced by the addition of titles related to the recent war. More significantly, however, the title defines the speaker of the poem as Jones rather than as the poet, who is once again masking himself.

The effect of the original title is to obscure the poem's metaphoric levels, which again deal with the necessity of leaving the security of land and learning "What it is to go to sea," the necessity to seek to confront the meaning of the universe. Significantly, Freneau introduces here a new element into the metaphoric necessity in that here we are invited, as his audience, to participate in seeking. This element is

particularly present in the 1795 version, in which Freneau drops the mask and retitles the poem simply "The Invitation."

Thou, who on some dark mountain's brow
Hast toil'd thy life away till now,
And often from that rugged steep
Beheld the vast extended deep,
Come from thy forest, and with me
Learn what it is to go to sea.

There endless plains the eye surveys
As far from land the vessel strays;
No longer hill nor dale is seen,
The realms of death intrude between,
But fear no ill; resolve, with me
To share the dangers of the sea.

But look not there for verdant fields-
Far different prospects Neptune yields;
Green seas shall only greet the eye,
Those seas encircled by the sky,
Immense and deep--come then with me
And view the wonders of the sea.

Yet sometimes groves and meadows gay
Delight the seamen on their way;
From the deep seas that round us swell
With rocks the surges to repel
Some verdant isle, by waves embrac'd,
Swells, to adorn the wat'ry waste.

Though now this vast expanse appear
With glassy surface, calm and clear;
Be not deceiv'd--'tis but a show,
For many a corpse is laid below--
Even Britain's lads--it cannot be--
They were the <u>masters</u> of the sea!

Now combating upon the brine,
Where ships in flaming squadrons join,
At every blast the brave expire
'Midst clouds of smoke, and streams of fire;
But scorn all fear ; advance with me--
'Tis but the custom of the sea.

Now we the peaceful wave divide,
On broken surges now we ride,
Now every eye dissolves with woe
As on some lee-ward coast we go--
Half lost, half buried in the main
Hope scarcely beams on life again.

Above us storms distract the sky,
Beneath us depths unfathom'd lie,
Too near we see, a ghastly sight,
The realms of everlasting night,
A wat'ry tomb of ocean-green
And only one frail plank between!

But winds must cease, and storms decay,
Not always lasts the gloomy day,
Again the skies are warm and clear,
Again soft zephyrs fan the air,
Again we find the long lost shore,
The winds oppose our wish no more.

If thou hast courage to despise
The various changes of the skies,
To disregard the ocean's rage,
Unmov'd when hostile ships engage,
Come from thy forest, and with me
Learn what it is to go to sea.

"The Invitation" is directed literally to the landsman--"Thou, who on some dark mountain's brow/Hast toil'd thy life away." The speaker says nothing, however, about "seeking honor or wealth" or even about serving country, referring directly to war only twice. In stanza six he paints a brief but vivid picture of battle "upon the brine/Where ships in flaming squadrons join." There "at every blast the brave expire/Midst clouds of smoke, and streams of fire." This description is not intended to entice anyone to sea, but rather to illustrate the dangers that might be found there and further to establish the premise of the stanza's couplet:

But scorn all fear, advance with me--
'Tis but the custom of the sea.

One should go to sea only with full awareness of what might be met there. The emphasis is on the mystery and danger of the sea, not on the honor and glory of war, though the horror of the war at sea is part of the sea's danger.

In stanza ten, the speaker again refers, this time obliquely, to war. Here the participial phrase "Unmov d when hostile ships engage" modifies either "ocean's rage" or "thou" understood. The syntactical ambiguity of the phrase is more significant than its allusion to warfare. If "Captain Jones' Invitation" is a simple plea to Freneau's countrymen to ship upon American men of war then it is so only at the most superficial level and only to those who infer so from its original title. The poem is also several years too late in its initial publication to achieve the desired effect.

The first stanza of "The Invitation" quickly establishes the tension between land and sea: "often from that rugged steep" has the landsman "beheld the vast extended deep." He is exhorted to "Come from [his] forest" with the speaker to learn "what it is to go to sea." The emphasis in this couplet is focused not only, as one would expect, on its riming words, me and sea, but also on its verbs, come and learn. In lines 2 through 4, the poet has established an iambic pattern which in lines 5 and 6 is shifted so that come and learn rather than from and what are stressed. The couplet emphasizes that we may come and learn both from the speaker and from the sea. Both are actively teachers but we must make the effort to come and be taught.

Stanza one introduces us to the speaker's exhortation. Part of the function of stanzas two through nine is to show us what we can expect to confront if we accept that exhortation. We have often beheld the "vast, extended deep" from the shore, but now we will venture out to sea. "There endless plains the eye surveys/As far from land the vessel strays," says the speaker. Between the vessel and the "hill[or]dale" of land intrude "the realms of death." Like death, the sea is impenetrable and undecipherable. Moreover, the sea can be deadly. Yet the speaker calls on us to "resolve. . .to share the dangers of the sea" with him. Together, he implies, we need "fear no ill." The effect of his direct address to us is to establish a kind of partnership with us and to suggest that the poet has accepted the responsibility to reveal the truth to us.

The complexity of that which we must learn is conveyed in the association of sea, sky, and eye in stanza three. No "verdant fields" are found at sea: we need not look for them. "Far different prospects Neptune yields," green seas, "those seas encircled by the sky." The green of verdant fields is juxtaposed here with the green of the sea, which is described as a vast "plain," and the resultant contrast is heightened by the association of sea and sky. In '95, Freneau changes green to blue in order to strengthen that association. First, as noted, the sky encircles the sea. Secondly, both the sea and the sky are "immense and deep." This adjective phrase follows sky and would appear to be its modifier; however,

"immense and deep" also modifies "those seas"--we would associate the sea rather than the sky with deep. Furthermore, line 16 may be in apposition with green seas, since it is set off from the rest of the sentence in which it appears by commas; therefore, "immense and deep" may even modify eye in line 15. Sky and eye are associated by rime, sea and eye by the pun on seeing, sea and sky by the fact that one encircles the other; all three are associated by the fact that they are all implicitly "immense and deep." The sea's immensity and depth are enhanced by their comparison to the depth and immensity of the sky. Conversely, the eye must be able to see comprehensively and profoundly--immensely and deeply--in order to "view the wonders of the sea."

"Yet sometimes groves and meadows gay" decorate the surface of the sea. These compose the "verdant isle" which "by waves embrac'd/Swells, to adorn the wat'ry waste." Stanza four, like its predecessor, is also syntactically complex. "Groves and meadows gay/Delight the seamen," yet these gay scenes are apparently surrounded by rocks which repel the ocean's surges and would therefore destroy any ship hurled upon them. On one hand, the rocks protect the isle from the sea's crashing waves; on the other hand, they bristle up out of the sea, or lurk dangerously beneath its surface. We wonder whether the sea "swell[s]/With rocks" or whether "with rocks. . .some verdant isle by waves embrac'd/Swells." Both the sea and the isle "swell" with rocks apparently, so that both harbor a destructive element.

Moreover, the isle "adorns" the "deep sea" as though it were some bauble floating superficially. Swelling, like the sea and its waves, the isle seems to bob along the surface as though it has little to do with the sea's depth. Additionally this isle is associated with the fields of the mainland by its verdure. The suggestion here is one with which we are familiar: life on land is life which is shallow. Life at sea and life on land equally swell with rocks, but the former allows the experience of the immense and deep while the latter does not.

Groves and meadows may appear to be gay, but they are not necessarily so. Stanza five shows us that the sea, likewise, may not be what it appears to be. "Though now this vast expanse appear/With glassy surface, calm and clear," warns the speaker, "Be not deceiv'd--'tis but a show." The sea is an immense tomb to the speaker--"for many a corpse is laid below." The sheen inferred from the "glassy surface" seems suggestive of a visual splendour similar to that presented in "The Vanity of Existence." Certainly, we are here quite aware that a similar kind of corruption is below this surface of the tide. The "bank of mud" here couches "many a corpse." "Even Britain's lads," once "masters of the sea," are "laid below" this "glassy surface." No one, not even the most experienced and adept sailor, can be secure on the bosom of the main.

In stanza six, the poem appears simply to depict the martial struggle which had so recently occurred. "Combating upon the brine," ships "in flaming squadrons join" in battle. At every cannon's blast, "the brave expire/Midst clouds of

smoke, and streams of fire". This frightful prospect notwithstanding, we should "scorn all fear" and "advance" with the speaker, for such combats are only "the custom of the sea." The clouds of smoke, like the glassy surface of the sea, hide something; as corpses lie beneath the surface of the sea, so the brave expire beneath the smoke. Death and decay seem always to lie below the surface of all we survey. Still, advance we must and scorn all fears as the speaker does. He dismisses his grim insight with the off-handed comment "'Tis but the custom of the sea." Note that the core of the poem's meaning lies at its structural center, in stanzas five and six, and that the tone of this last comment suggests calm acceptance of the nature of the sea and of the nature of the smoke and fire which at once obscure and illuminate our perceptions and may either destroy or instruct us.

Calm, even detached, the speaker further describes in stanzas seven and eight some of the varieties of experience we may taste at sea, capturing here vividly a sense of the fluidity of the natural world. Now we "divide. . .peaceful" waves; next we ride "broken surges"; then upon "some lee-ward coast" we are woefully driven. Above us is a stormy sky; "Beneath us depths unfathom'd lie." Our eyes "dissolve with woe" as we sink "half lost, half buried" in the sea. But this condition of dissolution does not last long; none of the events of these stanzas can, since they are in flux. Soon again we see "too near. . .a ghastly sight/The realms of everlasting night." That is, we achieve the insight that the "ocean-green" is a

"wat'ry tomb." Here the green of the ocean is ironically juxtaposed with the green of the verdant fields and the verdant isle, both of which are supposedly green with fecundity and life. The sea, however, is green with death and corruption. "Hope scarcely beams on life again" as we sail "half lost" over "depths unfathom'd," perhaps because we cannot penetrate and thus "fathom" the nature of "everlasting night." Yet hope does beam, even though scarcely, for that "one frail plank" is between us and the watery tomb to sustain us. Reference to "realms of everlasting night" may suggest Freneau's sense of the void underpinning surface reality. In the original version of "The Invitation" he calls them a "ghastly sight." In 1795 he calls them "disheartening sight," a revision which suggests the kinship between this poem and "The Argonaut."[15] What is significant about the realms of night, then, is not that they are observably ghastly, but that our vision of them affects us strongly. Nonetheless, we must scorn all fear, have fortitude, and cling to our "one frail plank."

Stanza nine captures the sense of flux present throughout the poem. Winds "cease"; storms "decay"; the gloomy day ends; <u>again</u> skies clear and warm; again zephyrs fan the air. Throughout the poem we are shown that the phenomenological universe is not fixed and static but fluid and dynamic. If, therefore, we have "courage to despise/The various changes of the skies"--that is, if we can be flexible enough to accept the constantly shifting realities of the "immense and deep" universe we inhabit--

then we may leave our forest and the "dark mountain's brow" and heed our poet's refrain: "Learn what it is to go to sea." If we do so we may discover that the truth may in fact be undiscoverable, but that we must leave safety and security to seek, nonetheless.

Without A Partner and Without A Guide: Conclusion

Close examination of the 1786 edition of Philip Freneau's poems reveals, I believe, several significant components of the development of the poet's thought and technique. First, Freneau seriously questions the concept of the spiritual afterlife of the soul and at least grants the possibility that the soul is material. Freneau can find little rationally acceptable evidence to support the notions of heaven or the resurrection of the dead. However, he realizes that doubt is hardly knowledge; he cannot, therefore, be sure, "for when did ghost return?" Lacking concrete support for belief, and knowing full well that appearances may be deceiving, he seeks to probe the axis of reality and to discover the significance of his existence.

The poet's probing is embodied in various ways in the poetry. For example, "The American Village," "The House of Night," and "Plato. . .to. . .Theon" deny traditional Christian beliefs. The lyrics of 1786 support this denial and expand upon and illuminate it. "The Dying Elm" examines its speaker's self-centered inability to accept the truths that the poet himself has begun to accept. "A Moral Thought" probes the dichotomy between appearance and reality and finally rejects "that true life" in recognizing that beneath the surface lies the

eternal mud of decay. "The Dying Indian" continues to examine "that" life from the perspective of this one and concludes rationally that one cannot know what to expect. "Verses Made At Sea. . .", however, seems to be the initial attempt to work out a solution to the dilemma, to spurn the life "safe on shore" and to seek actively. "The Vernal Ague" returns to an examination of the superficiality of appearance and re-establishes the impossibility of recapturing youthful illusions. Perhaps "Captain Jones' Invitation" to "learn what it is to go to sea" provides metaphorically the most clear-cut statement of the poet's position in 1786: all we know is that we do not, and, possibly, cannot know; therefore, we must seek. Thus the poet seems to have reached at least a temporary working solution to his problem of belief, a solution foreshadowing the development of pragmatic philosophy in 19th-century America. One seeks truth for its own value in a universe in which reality is evanescent and life is transient.

Thus in 1786 Freneau had developed a style which is in many ways revolutionary. Employing the concrete and particular to convey vividly the nature of phenomena, he utilizes riming and metric techniques to underscore his themes and masks himself so as to achieve a detached stance which will allow him to consider the meaning of his experiences objectively. These elements, in particular, fuse in Freneau's art a synthesis of

sound, structure, and sense which examines the central tensions in the poet's vision: The cleavage between belief and doubt is embodied in the dichotomy between appearance and reality and in the respective tensions between land and sea, passivity and activity, security and the dangers of seeking. Perhaps the fact that the personae of the poems of 1786 are typically quite alone suggests the poet's implicit awareness that his own seeking, both poetic and philosophic, leads him in unexplored directions which may only be traveled alone:

> Long the journey is that I must go,
> Without a partner and without a guide.

CHAPTER IV: "We Press to One Abode": introducing The Miscellaneous Works of Philip Freneau, 1788

The twenty-two months between the publication of the first and second volumes of Philip Freneau's poetry appear to have been uneventful. The poet remained at sea, perhaps for financial reasons, and was to continue as master of coastal traders such as Monmouth, Industry, and Columbia until late in 1789. Although he was busily employed in this pursuit, Freneau was regularly able to contribute poems to newspapers in the ports at which he traded, primarily The Freeman's Journal in Philadelphia and The Columbian Herald in Charleston. Freneau was beginning his most profitable period as a sea captain,[1] but, though his output of poems necessarily slackened somewhat during the latter part of 1787 and through 1788 and '89, the continuing publication of his works in periodicals such as these illustrates his continuing concern with the issues which he had been exploring in his poetry. For example, "The Wild Honey Suckle," perhaps his best known poem, appeared in July, 1786 in The Columbian Herald. "The Departure" and "May to April" both appeared in the same issue of The Freeman's Journal in April of 1787, followed in August by "The Scornful Lady." Matthew Carey included "Lines Occasioned by a Visit to an Old Indian Burying Ground," which, like "The Wild Honey Suckle", was destined to be widely reprinted, in the just-founded American Museum in November, 1787.

The Miscellaneous Works appeared in April of 1788. Consisting of approximately equal parts of prose and poetry, this collection, says Lewis Leary, is "perhaps the most representative volume that Freneau ever published."[2] In this edition, Freneau focuses on the dichotomy between appearance and reality and on the tension between land and sea as he had in 1786. However, he begins here to explore the relationships between reason and fancy and between art and nature more fully than he had before. Freneau seems to be developing more control over his dark vision and over his mode of expression, a control which is perhaps reflected in the detachment which he is able to achieve through the various voices he employs in these poems. Through his exploration of reason and fancy and nature and art, the poet seems to come to understand himself and the artist within him more fully. This understanding seems to be reflected in the poet's concern, in the 1788 poems, with self-knowledge. Freneau's exploration of self is, of course, related to the continuing exploration of the universe he inhabits. The poems of 1788 question the traditional belief in the afterlife through an examination of the seasonal cycle, which had traditionally been used to support man's hope in a resurrection. Characteristically, Freneau employs the conventional approach to another purpose. These themes are introduced by such poems as the previously unpublished "The Pictures of Columbus," and in "The Departure" and "The Scornful Lady" and developed more fully in the major lyrics of the 1788 edi tion. "Picture IX" of "The Pictures of Columbus " had first appeared as "Thomas and Susan, An

Irish-Town Dialogue" in February, 1787. Leary believes that "The Pictures. . ." had been written in 1774,[3] but Freneau did not date the poem until it appeared, much altered, in the 1795 edition of his works. Freneau may have affixed the date to the 1795 version in order to give the impression that his production antedates Joel Barlow's popular The Columbiad, which had first appeared as The Vision of Columbus in 1782.[4] Freneau may have begun the poem in 1774, as his date claims, but he did not publish it then and the version which appears in 1788 is unique to The Miscellaneous Works. At any rate, "The Pictures of Columbus" provides the context within which the edition as a whole should be considered.

"The Pictures of Columbus" consists in 1788 of eighteen "Pictures" of varying length and structure. The poem has no explicit narrator but is rather presented dramatically, as a series of monologues or dialogues. Each "Picture" is framed by a title which establishes its context, while transition from picture to picture is achieved largely through the development of the plot. "The Pictures of Columbus" raises a variety of issues, the most obvious of which is that greed corrupts. Columbus, in his desire to discover the new world, appeals to the pride, vanity, and greed of Ferdinand and Isabella. Addressing Ferdinand, Columbus says:

> Prince and pride of Spain! while meaner crowns,
> Pleas'd with the shadow of monarchial sway,
> Exact obedience from some paltry tract
> Scarce worth the pain and toil of governing,
> Be thine the generous care to send thy fame
> Beyond the knowledge, or the guess of man.
> This gulphy deep. . .

> Must be the passage to some other shore
> Where nations dwell, children of early time. . .
> Who some false deity, no doubt, adore
> Owning no virtue in the potent cross:
> What honour, sire, to plant your standards there,
> And souls recover to our holy faith
> That now in paths of dark perdition stray
> Warp'd to his worship by the evil one![6]

In a footnote to line 14, Freneau explains that "most historians" allow that Ferdinand was "an implicit believer, and one of the most superstitious bigots of his age" and Freneau's Columbus seeks to tempt his pride through this appeal to the monarch's blind religious faith. Moreover, Columbus offers Isabella the chance to attain a "happier lot" (VI, 6) than those "dejected. . . Turkish queens" who have been taught only one virtue, "to obey. . .some eastern tyrant" (VI, 1-4). Because she "share[s] the rich Castilian throne" (VI, 8), she may now extend her reign "to the wide world's remotest end" (VI, 12). In addition, the explorer promises "abounding wealth" (VI, 20), including "fine pearls. . .diamonds bright and coral green. . .yellow shells, and virgin gold,and silver" (VI, 26-30). Finally, Columbus offers Isabella the opportunity to undo the mischief done by Eve:

> As men were forc'd from Eden's shade
> By errors that a woman made,
> Permit me at a woman's cost
> To find the climates that we lost.
> (XI, 33-36)

The effect of these exaggerated compliments and promises of bounty is shown in "Picture VII," "Queen Isabella's Page of Honour Writing A Reply to Columbus." Says the page:

> Your yellow shells and coral green,
> And gold and silver-not yet seen,
> Have made such mischief in a woman's mind
> The queen could almost pillage from the crown
> And add some costly jewels of her own
> Thus sending you that charming coast to find
> Where all these heavenly things abound. . . .
> (VII, 1-7)

Columbus also appeals to greed in his search for a crew. In "Picture VIII," "Columbus at the Harbor of Palos, in Andalusia," Columbus exhorts the sailors:

> Ye that would rise beyond the rags of fortune
> Coasting your native shores on shallow seas. . .
> Now meditate with me a bolder plan,
> Catching at fortune in her plenitude!
> . . .He that sails with me
> Shall reap a harvest of immortal honour:
> Wealthier he shall return than they that now
> Lounge in the lap of principalities,
> Hoarding the gorgeous treasures of the east.
> (VIII, 26-50)

But they turn their backs on him. At last Columbus resorts to seducing unemployed sailors in their cups:

> When desperate plans are most acceptable,
> Impossibilities are possible,
> And all the spring and vigour of the mind
> Is strained to madness and audacity. . . .
> (XII, 26-29)

This tactic proves disastrous: no sooner has Columbus landed in the new world than one of his men murders a native for his earrings, "which would not have weigh'd/One poor piastre" (XIV, 34-35), and, ultimately, the explorer is superseded as admiral and viceroy and sent in chains back to Castile (XVII). He dies knowing that "those chains that sullied all [his] glory/Not mine but their's" (XVIII, 23-24) were the chains of pride and avarice which imprisoned Ferdinand and Isabella and would

corrupt the new world which had once been "unsullied by the hands of men" (XIV, 47).

Freneau simultaneously considers themes which, though corollary here, are central in other works. First, he develops the tensions between reason and fancy and between land and sea; second, he considers the nature of the afterlife. Columbus is "persuaded" of the existence of the "new worlds" by "reason," he tells the Inchantress (II, 68-69). In studying his charts, Columbus has seen "such disproportion" (I, 2) that he has concluded that all the land mass on Earth could not possibly be placed "in one poor corner" (I, 5). This conclusion leads him to draw a new world on his charts, after "Imploring Fancy to [his] aid" (I, 21). However, though reason tells him that his belief is valid, he seeks the advice of the Inchantress as reinforcement. She predicts what Columbus could have reasoned out for himself were he to reason clearly:

> For this the ungrateful shall combine,
> And hard misfortune shall be thine;--
> For this the base reward remains
> Of cold neglect and galling chains!
> (II, 100-104)

Columbus already realizes that avarice is the motivation which prompts Isabella,[7] and Freneau employs the mirror in "Picture III" to point this out. After all, what one sees when one looks into a mirror is one's self. "Strange things I see, bright mirror, in thy breast--" says Columbus (III, 1), a phrase that suggests that he peers into his own breast, though he calls the mirror "the witch's glass" (III, 15). What, therefore, Columbus' reason has assured him must exist--"Fine islands. . .

cover'd with trees, and beasts, and yellow men" (III, 53-54)--his fancy reinforces. When Columbus seeks the aid of King Ferdinand, he argues rationally that the king should become his patron:

> Think not that Europe and the Asian waste,
> Or Africa, where barren sands abound,
> Are the sole gems in Neptune's bosom laid:
> Think not the world a vast extended plain:
> See yond' bright orbs, that through the ether-move,
> All globular; this earth a globe like them
> Walks her own rounds. . . .
> If all the surface of this mighty round
> Be one wide ocean of unfathom'd depth
> Bounding the little space already known,
> Nature must have forgot her wonted wit
> And made a monstrous havock of proportion.
> (IV, 19-30)

Columbus concludes that both "Platonic dreams, and reason's plainer page" (IV, 40) point to the existence of the new world. Thus, again, fancy supports reason.

Yet Columbus knows not only that fancy unbridled may lead him to disaster, if he goes forth "trusting only to a magic glass. . . ."(VIII, 3), but also, on the other hand, that "false learning" (VIII, 20) may lead to faulty "reasoning like schoolboys" (VIII, 22). Thus both faculties have their limits. Freneau develops the fancy-reason relationship further through the monologues of Bernardo, a Spanish friar, and Orosio, a mathematician, in their respective monologues, "Picture X" and "Picture XI." Bernardo's reason is false, and Orosio scoffs at fancy. Asks the former, "and did not Reason add convincing proofs/That this huge world is one continued plain. . ." (X,3-4), while the latter considers Columbus' voyage to be "building on fables. . .visions of Plato, mix'd with idle tales/Of later

date. . ." (XI, 14-16). In the end, Columbus too questions whether he has been deceived by fancy:

> How sweet is sleep, when gained by length of toil!
> No dreams disturb the slumbers of the dead--
> To snatch existence from this scanty soil,
> Were these the hopes deceitful fancy bred;
> And were her painted pageants nothing more
> Than this life's phantoms by delusion led? (XVIII, 1-6)

However, the dying explorer finds some solace in the "golden fancy" that his "woes [will be] repaid;/When empires rise where lonely forests grew" (XVIII, 15-17). Had he not gone boldly forth, the "new worlds. . .had still been empty visions" (XVII, 23-24). Thus the position regarding the relationship between reason and fancy appears to be consistent in "The Pictures of Columbus" with that taken in "The Indian Burying Ground." Although fancy and reason both may be misled, both must also be used, prudently and in balance.

While reason and fancy are being balanced, land and sea are being juxtaposed. The seas are "the realms of ruin. . . the boiling deep" (III, 47 and 50). On land, however,

> Eternal summer through the vallies smiles
> And fragrant gales o'er golden meadows play!--
> (III, 55-56)

Even though the sea is a "mad element" (XII, 2), Columbus is drawn to discover what it is that

> . . .we ought to see
> Buried behind the waters of the west,
> Clouded with the shadows of uncertainty. . .
> In the dark bosom of the fertile main,
> Unfathom'd, unattempted, unexplor'd.
> (IV, 41-48)

What is there in the "unfathom'd, unattempted, unexplor'd," he wonders. Though "clouded with the shadows of uncertainty,"

the "waters of the west" strongly attract the explorer. He is drawn, perhaps compelled, to seek, and perhaps the force which moves him is his own need to know--his need to fathom, to attempt, to explore. Thus, though the land represents "sweet sylvan scenes of innocence and ease" (XIV, 40) to Columbus, he has chosen, nonetheless, "to forfeit ease and that domestic bliss/Which is the lot of happy ignorance" (XVII, 13-14) and has sallied forth, leaving the land behind. Ultimately, even in the face of death, he seems content with his choice. "How sweet is sleep, when gain'd by length of toil!" he exclaims, anticipating his impending death. What sense of satisfaction Columbus attains grows out of his having toiled, his having gone to sea; had he remained on shore, he would have been easy and blissful, but ignorant.

Freneau subtly associates Columbus' need to explore the unknown in this world with the awareness that there is yet another unknown world, "unfathom'd, unattempted, unexplor'd," the world of the dead. Reflects Columbus,

> The winds blow high: one other world remains;
> Once more without a guide I find my way.
> (XVIII, 7-8)

Dying becomes but another mode of exploration, and, as always, one goes alone to learn what exists there in that "other world." Note that Columbus realizes, as had Shalum, the dying Indian, that when we go, we go "without a guide." However, Columbus seems to have some notion of what he will discover in the regions of death: "Joyless gloom. . .shadowy forms, and ghosts, and sleepy things" (XVIII, 13 and 19), await, but "no dreams dis-

turb the slumber of the dead" (XVIII, 2), so perhaps the gloom will not matter. As we have seen, Columbus realizes that only "deceitful fancy" offers the hope that "some comfort will attend [his] pensive shade" (XVIII, 14). Thus the effect of the allusion to the afterlife in "The Pictures of Columbus" is to reinforce the position that Freneau has consistently taken, that there is no rationally acceptable evidence of an afterlife.

Perhaps the reason why Freneau was drawn to Columbus may be found in the reaction of Ferdinand to the explorer:

> . . .him I honour. . .
> Who has a soul of so much constancy.
> (V, 39 and 40)

That "constancy" is high in Freneau's system of values is supported by the exclamation in Columbus' final soliloquy--"How sweet is sleep, when gain'd by length of toil!"-- which suggests that striving is its own reward. Columbus comes to represent, then, the man who questions the existing dogma and finds it wanting, both rationally and imaginatively, and who therefore seeks his own answers in spite of the obstacles and the self-isolation that results. Freneau's Columbus <u>is</u> idealized--the historical Columbus was no doubt moved, at least to some extent, by the same greed and pride which move Freneau's Ferdinand and Isabella--yet he is believable in his failures and in his efforts. Freneau's Columbus embodies the qualities which the poet most valued, and, as I have said, "The Pictures of Columbus" provides a framework in which to consider the other poems in the edition which it introduces.

"The Departure"[8] seems to be a significant measure of Freneau's attitude during the middle of the 1780's. Here Freneau develops the land/sea dichotomy with particular emphasis on the delusive quality of the land. The speaker's departure from land to sea may be seen as the representation of his departure from land's delusion. As he takes his way "from Hudson's cold congealing streams" (l. 1) to the ocean, winter has come. Although "good natur'd Neptune" is "now so mild" (l. 8), the speaker likens this state to "rage asleep, or madness chain'd" (l. 9) because he is well aware of the sea's power.

The body of "The Departure" consists of two parts: stanzas 3, 4, and 5 (ll. 20-52) explore the delusive quality of the land; stanzas 6, 7, and 8 (ll. 53-76) reflect on the significance of that delusiveness. Setting the scene, the speaker evokes the presence of death. The sun has "sunk"; the day is "past"; the breeze "decays"; and "all is still/As all shall be at last" (ll. 20-23). The speaker emphasizes the quietness of the scene by noting that "the murmuring. . .[of] the dying wave" (ll. 24-25) is all he hears. Enveloped in a shroud devoid of light, motion, sound, and warmth, the speaker is aware that his illusions have been stripped away:

> The yellow fields now disappear
> No painted butterflies are near,
> And laughing folly plagues no more.
> (ll. 26-28)

Winter's coming has brought with it the speaker's awareness of the transience of life. "How smit with frost the pride of June!" he laments, "How lost to me! how very soon/The fairy prospects die!" (ll. 33-35). All that surrounded him on land

stressed the falseness of those "yellow fields" and "painted butterflies." These "fairy prospects" are "lost" to the speaker as were the "budding leaf" and the "charms" of the forest "lost" to the speaker of "The Vernal Ague." This language stresses the superficial quality of what the speaker has seen: "fairy prospects" are vacuous, the scenes of "deceitful fancy." Now the forests "seem. . .desolate. . .their short liv'd verdure at an end" (ll. 39-40). Yet these were once forests

> Beneath whose shade
> The enamour'd maid
> Was once so fond to dream.
> (ll. 41-43)

Note that the "shade" of these trees, like the shade of the dying elm, encourages "dreams"--dreams which implicitly remain unfulfilled.

Now, having grasped the reality beneath these fleeting appearances, the speaker realizes that

> The sport is past, the song is done;
> And nature's naked forms declare,
> The rifled groves, the vallies bare,
> Persuasively, tho' silent, tell,
> That at the best they were but drest
> Sad mourners for the funeral bell.
> (ll. 47-52)

Thus in stanza six the speaker asks himself, "Say, what does all this folly mean?"--and answers himself with a challenge:

> Is fortitude to heaven confin'd--?
> No - planted also in the mind,
> She smooths the ocean when she will.

The fortitude of the mind is a necessity, the speaker realizes, because "life is pain" (l. 60), and he goes on to catalogue some of the causes of that pain, the "ills" that "try" man (l. 60): "malice dark and calumny. . . indifference. . .

slander. . . bold ignorance. . . cowardice. . . pride, and cold disgust," and "servility that licks the dust" (ll. 61-70). The speaker regards these human faults as "harpies that disgrace the mind" (l. 71), and notes that "the summer day" that once "charm'd the soul to rest" is now "lost in gloom," just as the "shade so gay" has "vanish'd" (ll. 74-76). "Shade" has given way to "gloom;" as illusion has given way to awareness of reality.

The final stanza of "The Departure" sums up the speaker's thoughts. Once the "golden age" (l. 79) is stripped away, it cannot be regained by

> . . .those on life's uncertain road;
> Where lost in folly's idle round,
> And seeking what shall ne'er be found,
> We press to one abode. (ll. 82-85)

Certainly, that which we seek but shall never find exists only in the fact that we do, indeed, "press to one abode," the grave. Perhaps the implication is that death is the ultimate reality; what is clear is that "The Departure" expresses a very dark view of life. However, though "The Departure" is stated strongly, its view of phenomenological reality is consistent with that of both "The Vernal Ague" and that of "The Vanity of Existence."

Freneau states in "The Departure" that the ills that try man were "Unknown to haunt the human breast/When pleasure her first garden dress'd" (ll. 72-73). The implication is the familiar notion that man in his original state, in the "golden age," was not plagued by his own weaknesses but that these

weaknesses developed later as he was gradually socialized. Note that the ills Freneau lists are social. Yet, though he touches the theme of man's moral degeneration, he seems more interested in the opposite theme, the concept that man can regenerate himself. The key element in this regeneration seems to be for the individual to attempt to understand his own nature and his relationship with the world around him. "The Scornful Lady"[9] explores the subject of self-awareness humorously, employing an abrupt ending to emphasize the fact that all our vanities end in the grave, the one abode. The scornful nymph, decked out "in all her gay attire" (l. 1),is likened to a corsair "bound on a cruise to capture hearts" (l. 4). Freneau employs the war-ship metaphor throughout the poem, suggesting the aggressiveness of the girl's coquetry. She is more elusive than a "privateer" (l. 11), and, "Proud of the artillery of her eyes" (l. 13), she disdains to claim "so poor a prize" (l. 14) as the "Young Jockey from. . .Kent" (l. 9) who pursues but cannot catch her. Instead, "she struck him dumb, and left him there" (l. 16) like huntsmen who slaughter deer and leave their corpses "to languish on the plain" (l. 20). Of course, the speaker has also been her victim:

> When first this heav'nly form I pass'd,
> She back'd her topsails to the mast--
> I saw there was no chance to fly,
> At once she bade me yield or die.
>
> Amaz'd at such a strange attack
> I chang'd my course and hurried back,
> But such a fatal arrow met
> As pierc'd me deep, and pains me yet.

> Ah, Celia, what a strange mistake
> To ruin just for ruin's sake,
> Thus to delude us in distress,
> And quit the prize you should possess.
> (11. 21-32)

Celia's pride is "to ruin for ruin's sake;" Freneau reveals, through this insight into Celia, a portrait of an individual whose lack of self-regard leads her to manipulate others in an attempt to establish her own worth. She has no respect for men; she captures them simply to prove her own value, while she regards them as valueless. The speaker puts this behavior into perspective in the final stanza:

> Years may advance with silent pace
> And rob that form of every grace,
> And all your conquests be repaid--
> With Teague O'Murphy, and his spade.
> (11. 33-36)

Thus Celia's "conquests" count for naught, and, ironically, the last--perhaps the only--man to possess her will be the lowly grave digger, Teague O'Murphy. Perhaps the jockey could not catch her--but the grave digger catches us all. In order to live meaningfully, we must seek actively to understand ourselves, but Celia is a ship lost on a sea of misconception; she is the victim of her own inability--or unwillingness--to examine her course.

These three poems, "Pictures of Columbus," "The Departure," and "The Scornful Lady" not only suggest the themes with which Freneau is most concerned in 1788, but also illustrate the variety of approaches he employs in conveying those themes. "Pictures of Columbus" is a series of dramatic encounters either in monologue or dialogue form; "The Departure" is elegiac in

tone, and discursive and philosophic; "The Scornful Lady" is ironic and satirical. Taken together, these poems illustrate Freneau's awareness of the necessity to seek to grasp the reality underlying not only the surface of the world we inhabit but also that underlying our own outward appearances.

CHAPTER V: "Nature Owns The Aid of Art": Five Lyrics of The Miscellaneous Works

Self knowledge is of central importance in The Miscellaneous Works. Freneau is growing more fully in control of his ability to confront artistically the questions which are raised by his perceptions of the world. In working out a balance between reason and fancy, he is measuring himself and the use and extent of his own powers. Likewise, in exploring the interaction of art and nature, he is gauging the relative powers of art; he seems to need to know himself and his medium in order to proceed with his probing and questioning. The lyrics which we will discuss here are examples not only of his developing craftsmanship but also of his developing thought. "The Lost Sailor" reviews Freneau's exploration of the symbolic tension between land and sea, and also provides an excellent example of Freneau's use of concrete, specific description.

"The Wild Honey Suckle" and "May to April" relate the irresistible natural cycle of decay and rebirth to man's situation, while "The Indian Burying Ground" and "The Man of Ninety" explore the implications of the relationships between reason and fancy and nature and art.

1. "The Painted Barque"; "The Lost Sailor"/"The Argonaut"

"The Lost Sailor,"[1] which had first appeared in the March 6, 1786 Columbian Herald, is similar to "The Dying Indian" in that it is a monologue framed by narrative. However, the narrator here is not the detached observer of the earlier work but is involved directly in the experience of the poem. The security of land and the danger of the sea are emphasized by the contrast between the narrator of "The Lost Sailor" and Ralph, the title character.

True to his trade--the slave of fortune still--
In a sweet isle, where never winter reigns,
I found him at the foot of a tall hill,
Mending old sails, and chewing sugar canes:
   Pale ivy round him grew, and mingled vines,
   Plantains, bananas ripe, and yellow pines,

And flowering night-shade with its dismal green,
Ash-colour'd iris painted by the sun,
And fair-hair'd hyacinth was near him seen,
And China pinks by marygolds o'er-run:--
   "But what (said Ralph) have I, that sail the seas,
   "Ah, what have I to do with things like these!

"I did not wish to leave those shades, not I,
"Where Amoranda turns her spinning wheel;
"Charm'd with the shallow stream, that murmur'd by,
"I felt as blest as any swain could feel,
   "Who, seeking nothing that the world admires,
   "To one poor valley fix'd his whole desires.

"With masts so trim, and sails as white as snow,
"The painted barque deceiv'd me from the land:
"Pleas'd, on her sea-beat decks I wish'd to go,
"Mingling my labours with her hardy band;
   "The captain bade me for the voyage prepare,
   "And said--By Jasus, 'tis a grand affair!

"To combat with the winds who first essay'd,
"Had these gay groves his lightsome heart beguil'd,
"His heart attracted by the charming shade
"Had chang'd the deep sea for the woody wild;
   "And slighted all the gain that Neptune yields
   "For Damon's cottage, or Palemon's fields.

"His barque, the bearer of a feeble crew,
"How could he trust when none had been to prove her;
"Courage might sink when lands and shores withdrew,
"And sickly whelps might spoil the best manoeuvre;
   "But Fortitude, tho' woes and death await,
   "Still views bright skies, and leaves the dark to fate.

"From monkey climes where limes and lemons grow,
"And the sweet orange swells her fruit so fair,
"To wintry worlds with heavy heart I go
"To face the cold glance of the northern bear,
   "Where lonely waves, far distant from the sun,
   "And gulphs, of mighty strength, their circuits run.

"But how disheartening is the wanderer's fate!
"When conquer'd by the loud tempestuous main,
"On him, no mourners in procession wait,
"Nor do the sisters of the harp complain,
"Nor can I think on coral beds they sleep
"Who sink in storms, and mingle with the deep.

"'Tis folly all--for who can truly tell
"What streams disturb the bosom of that main,
"What ugly fish in those dark climates dwell
"That feast on men--then stay, my gentle swain!
"Bred in yond' happy shades, be happy there,
"And let these quiet groves claim all th y care."

So spoke poor Ralph, and with a smooth sea gale
Fled from the magic of the inchanting shore,
But whether winds or waters did prevail
I saw the black ship ne'er returning more,
Though long I walk'd the margin of the main,
And long have look'd, and still must look invain!

Ralph, we are told, is "true to his trade" and "slave of fortune," a remark the meaning of which is illustrated by Ralph's speech. The "sweet isle, where never winter reigns" and where the narrator and Ralph once met is a farrago of vegetation, a lush, prolific, paradise: the sailor chews sugarcane; around him grow "pale ivy" and "mingled vines. . .plantains, bananas ripe, and yellow pines"; "dismal green" flowering nightshade; "ash-colour'd iris painted by the sun"; the "fair-hair'd" hyacinth; and china pinks over-run by "marygolds." The profusion of this vegetation is exceeded only by its variety. In fact, this catalogue of plants is so miscellaneous that it establishes both a sense of concrete reality and, at the same time, a subtle ambiguity vividly rendered. Sugar cane, plantains, and bananas are all varieties of tropical vegetation appropriate to a tropical island where "never winter" reigns. But ivy and yellow

pines are plants of the more temperate zones, ivy, in particular, being unable to endure severe heat and light. "Ash-coloured" iris is a contradiction in terms--*iris* means *rainbow*. One wonders where such a garden might be found.

Real, yet simultaneously unreal, the setting of Ralph's monologue conveys somehow a sense of foreboding. Ivy, after taking over a host tree, can choke it to death. The flowers of the "dismal green" nightshade are succeeded by tempting berries--which are poisonous. The china pinks are being strangled by the marigolds. "Ash-coloured" may be the color of death. Though beautiful, the "sweet isle" with its mingled multiplicity of plants, presents a picture of nature run wild, the antithesis of the static, controlled, and balanced nature panoramas which typify the Neo-Classical mode. Instead, the poet manages to convey the vitality and dynamism of the scene: the ivy is growing; the vines, plantains, bananas, and pines mingle; the nightshade flowers; the sun paints the iris; the marigolds overrun the pinks. Freneau creates a fluid environment in part by employing several participles as modifiers: *mingled*, *flowering*, *colour'd*, *painted*, *hair'd*. The isle is indeed "sweet"--gratifying to the senses--because one is drawn into participation in its concreteness inspite of its strangeness. The varieties of vegetation seem chosen rather for the sounds of their names than for the possibility that they might all actually be found growing together. *Ivy*, *vines*, *bananas ripe*, *pines*, *nightshade*, *iris*, and *hyacinth* are all linked by the

assonance of long i. The poet employs consonance in canes, plantains, and painted; repeats the short i of mingled, hyacinth, iris, "flowering. . .with its dismal. . .," and alliterates the h of hair'd and hyacinth and the N of mingled vines, plantains, bananas, and pines in order to create a resonant, lush, sound quality which functions with the suggested activity of the modifiers to emphasize the vitality of the setting.

Later, in lines 37-38, a similar sound density is achieved:

> "From monkey climes where lime and lemons grow,
> "And the sweet orange swells her fruit so fair. . . ."

Here Ralph himself is describing the latitudes he will be leaving in terms which rime profusely. Note the echoing short and long o sounds; the alliterated m, sw, s, and f; the consonance of long i and m. These are not simple verbal felicities, but, since these and lines 5-10 contain the poem's only closely packed alliterative, assonant, and consonant rimes, are intended to emphasize the lush richness and concreteness of the "sweet isle."

The extent to which Freneau is departing from the Neo-Classic tradition is revealed by a comparison of the first 10 lines of "The Lost Sailor" to the guidelines laid down by Imlac in Samuel Johnson's Rasselas:

> The business of a poet. . .is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances; he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recal the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another neglected, for those characteristicks which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.[2]

Not only does Freneau refuse to "neglect the minuter discriminations," but his description of the sweet isle is so concrete and particular that, as we have seen, one wonders if such a specific place could actually exist. At any rate, these lines "recall" no "original" and their characteristics would hardly be obvious alike to both vigilance and carelessness."

Freneau's revision of "The Lost Sailor" supports the notion that he is working toward the subtle establishment of the poem's metaphoric level and that he is conscious of his departure from Neo-Classic tenets. Significantly, lines 5 through 10, the entire lush island setting, are added in the '86 edition. The original, Columbian Herald, edition simply places Ralph, chewing cane and mending sails, "at the foot of a tall hill" (ll. 3-4). In that it both establishes the ambiguous quality of the land and embodies the break with the kind of nature description typical of Freneau's assumed precedents, the added description is crucial to the poem. On one level, then, the poet has created a remarkably sensual and concrete setting, while on another level he has tinged that setting with ambiguity. Thus we are prepared when, in the last stanza, the narrator refers to "the magic of the inchanting shore" (l. 56) and we are made aware that both the land and the sea may deceive and destroy.

When Ralph first speaks, he rejects the edenic isle:

> "But what (said Ralph) have I, that sail the seas,
> "Ah, what have I to do with things like these!"

Yet Ralph is the "slave of fortune" and we learn that he "did not wish to leave." Implicit in his story from its beginning

is the question of why he leaves the shore. Even though Amoranda--a name which is obviously constructed to suggest a lover--spins her wheel there, Ralph must leave. These "shades" which harbor her harbor also the "shallow" stream which "charm'd" Ralph so that he "felt as blest as any swain could feel." But, though his "whole desires" were fixed in that "one poor valley," Ralph is lured to sea by the painted barque "with masts so trim, and sails as white as snow" because it "pleas'd" him. The charm of the painted barque is as strong as the charm of the shades and the shallow stream and sun-painted iris but no more substantial, as Ralph has learned.

The shift in person which occurs in stanzas five and six, the mid-point of the poem, underscores the choice which Ralph makes. Up to this point, Ralph has spoken of himself; here he directs his attention to another, he "who first essay'd" to "combat with the winds" and who would readily have exchanged the "deep sea for the woody wild" if his "lightsome heart" had been "beguil'd" and "attracted by the charming shade." However, this first wanderer would not 'slight' all the gain that Neptune yields," opting rather to try his barque. Ralph emulates this earlier wanderer, even though the wanderer's fate may be "disheartening" (l. 43). But Ralph does not, as we shall see, urge any such emulation on his listener. The point seems to be that the choice either actively to seek or passively to retire to the seclusion of "charming shades" should be entirely one's own. Although Ralph seems to be enslaved by some force beyond his ken, he is actually driven by the force

of his own fortitude, like he whom he emulates, to continue to sea despite his awareness that "none have been to prove" his barque, that her crew is a "feeble" one, and that courage "might sink" when once out of sight of land. One who is insightful is aware that, as the poet shows, both land and sea may be delusive. Ralph chooses the "deep sea" rather than the "shallow stream," the implication being that the experience at sea, though dangerous, is the more meaningful.

Freneau continues to work toward the implicit articulation of the poem's metaphoric significance in subsequent editions. In the '95 version, the captain and his comments are deleted and replaced with:

> "To reef the sail, to guide the foaming prow,
> "As far as winds can waft, or oceans flow."
> (11. 22-24)

Freneau eliminates all reference to the captain in order clearly to define Ralph's role. He will himself "reef the sail" to catch most efficiently the winds and be wafted as far as he can: he will himself "guide the foaming prow." The suggestion is, of course, that each individual must seek his own destiny. Line 25 is changed in '09 from "To combat with the winds" to "To combat with the waves." This revision removes the contradition of being wafted by and at the same time battling the winds and helps set up the tension established in stanza ten between winds and waves. Furthermore, in the '09 edition, the title has been amended to "The Argonaut, or, Lost Adventurer," an allusion which tends to heighten the sense that Ralph, like the poet, seeks to understand himself and his world.

Freneau also eliminates in 1795 Ralph's direct reference to himself in line 11. "But what (said Ralph) have I" becomes "But what (said he) have men." The I in line 12 becomes they. The distinction thus introduced between I and they serves further to isolate Ralph--line 13, "I did not wish. . .not I," juxtaposing the two pronouns and their referents. Ralph will therefore trust his own individual fortitude and will seek to "view bright skies", attempting to discover the light of truth which may be glimpsed only by striving to do so. The "dark" of ignorance and security is left "to fate."

Both the sailor and the poet are aware of the challenge they face, as stanzas 7, 8, and 9 reveal. Here a new tension is created, that between the warm tropics and the cold north, which further underscores the tension already explicit between land and sea. Ralph must quit the "monkey climes" and go "with heavy heart" to face in "wintry winds" the "cold glance of the northern bear." "Lonely" waves and "mighty" gulfs flow there, "far distant from the sun." "Never winter" reigns on Ralph's "sweet isle," implying that the security he leaves is not that only of land but also of Amoranda's love, the warmth of human relationships. The waves of the north are "lonely" ones; the "wanderer's fate" is cold and lonely too. Indeed, if the sailor is "conquer'd by the loud tempestuous main," no mourners will attend him. No "sisters of the harp" will complain. Of course, the syntax of these lines is complex, suggesting the complexity of the problem. Note that the participial phrase "when conquer'd by the loud tempestuous main" modifies mourners, the

subject of the sentence, rather than him, which is the object of the preposition. The phrase also refers to "sisters of the harp," since the subject of the sentence's second independent clause is parallel with that of the first. The meaning of the passage is expanded, then, to suggest that the "mourners" and the "sisters of the harp," who are perhaps those who remain secure on land, are those who are overcome by the "loud tempestuous main" in spite of the assumption that this phrase describes the wanderer's fate.

Alone, the sailor seeks. "For who can truly tell" what he will discover--what "streams" or "ugly fish?" Again, the language is suggestive. The streams that "disturb the bosom of that main"--the "loud tempestuous main"--may be related to the "lonely waves" and "gulphs of mighty strength" which give the sea its awesome power. Yet these streams lie below the surface of "that main" and are not easily discernible, though they disturb. Implicit is the sense that the sailor confronts profound and mysterious depths. The "ugly fish" may suggest the powerful and destructive forces which lurk beneath the surface to "feast on men" who are unprepared in "those dark climates" to deal with them. "Ugly" becomes in 1795 "ravenous," a modifier which strengthens the destructive connotations of these forces.

Moreover, the emphasis on coldness and darkness functions, I believe, to stress the ignorance with which we face the unknown and fear that which we do not understand. Many men have sunk in storms and now "mingle with the deep." We do not know

the forces they have confronted,"for who can truly tell?" Yet, Ralph is compelled to face these enigmatic powers because he is a doer and a seeker. He will not acquiesce in the security of the "inchanting shore."

However, Ralph does not exhort his listener to join in his questing to understand. "Stay, my gentle swain," he says, "in yond' happy shades, be happy there" in "quiet groves." Ralph recognizes the dangers all too clearly. "'Tis folly all" he knows, "for who can truly tell?" He does not wish to convince anyone to join him, nor does his tale provide any inducement. His wistful tone--"I did not wish to leave. . .; how disheartening is the wanderer's fate"--emphasizes his internal tension. He is compelled to go, but the forces which move him are in conflict, not unlike the forces of the deep sea's winds and waves.

Although the narrator heeds Ralph's advice and remains ashore, he is evidently moved by Ralph's compulsion, for he walks the "margin of the main" searching for Ralph's ship and wondering whether the "winds or waters did prevail," that is whether the sailor's adventure has carried him to a new awareness or the ocean has destroyed him. To the narrator, Ralph has "fled. . .the magic of the inchanting shore," so we know that he is aware of the shore's charming quality. Still, he opts not to follow Ralph. To him, Ralph's barque is a "black ship," fearsome, foreboding, and the antithesis of the "painted barque" with "sails as white as snow." Though he peers out

over the sea searching for Ralph, he does not leave the land but strides the "margin" between land and sea. He appears to be in a transitional area, a neutral zone--somewhat like the observer of the tide in "The Vanity of Existence"--and is not ready to venture to sea or to see. But he "has looked and still must look in vain" for Ralph's return. We recall here the dying Indian's question: "When did ghost return, his state to shew?" Ralph's departure, though it is not the departure of death, is a parting so radical that it may well absolutely preclude his return. Since he may never return to tell his tale, his land-locked auditor may always look in vain and wonder, "who can truly tell." Because the truth one discovers about himself or herself is unique, it may be uncommunicable anyway.

In sum, then, the poem achieves its effect through the balancing of several tensions: land and sea, security and danger, dark and light, cold and warmth. These tensions are embodied in the dialogue between Ralph and the narrator. Obviously, the latter has been greatly affected by Ralph's words, for he remembers and recites them for us out of his past. "I found him" says the narrator, and we don't know exactly how long since, but we do know that an apparently substantial time has passed. "Long have I walked. . .and long have looked," says the narrator. Moreover, "The Argonaut" is constructed in such a way that the contrast between speaker and listener is emphasized: one acts; the other does not. There is therefore an implicit tension

between the active and the passive, a tension which Freneau will develop further, particularly in "The Wild Honey-Suckle." Furthermore, there is a subtle irony in this structure: the narrator, in telling us Ralph's story, reveals, perhaps inadvertently, much about himself, and each of these men reveals something of the poet.

Ralph is conscious of the stress generated by the clash of conflicting elements, and his awareness is expressed in the heart motif of the poem. Talking about the first wanderer and indirectly about himself, Ralph says in stanza five,

> "Had those gay groves his lightsome heart beguil'd,
> "His heart attracted by the charming shade,
> "Had changed the deep sea for the woody wild. . . ."

Note the pun on lightsome, which contrasts with the shades which Ralph realizes are "charming." The wanderer's heart is both carefree and full of light and is neither beguil ed nor fooled. Line 34 in '95 becomes "And feeble hearts a thousand deaths discover," a reference which heightens the impact of the following line, "But Fortitude. . .still views bright skies." The courageous heart seeks the light even though "disheartening is the wanderer's fate" (l. 43). Because of his fortitude, and in spite of his "heavy heart" (l. 39), Ralph is ultimately able to face the realization that

> "On Coral beds and delug'd sands they sleep
> "Who sink in storms and mingle with the deep."
> (ll. 47-48)

Significantly, the first line of this couplet is altered in '95 from the original, "Nor can I think on coral beds they sleep,"

a revision which reveals the poet's changed view. He has forsaken the conventional acceptance of an afterlife, and like Ralph, he faces what he sees.

The narrator, himself, is not quite ready to face these stern realities. He has not yet the heart--the fortitude--to do so. Ralph counsels him and perhaps this counsel distheartens him. Yet the reader is likely to find both characters sympathetic: Ralph, the sailor who must seek the unknown, the "slave" of his own fortune and fortitude; and the narrator, land-bound because he too, perhaps, is "slave" of fortune, but still drawn to the sea and half desiring to experience what Ralph is somewhere experiencing. Underlying the interplay of these many stresses and pulls is the metaphor which informs the poem. Given the poet's consistent use of charged language, his control of the poem's conflicts, and careful revision, I believe the metaphoric levels may be argued and sustained. In a sense, "The Argonaut" becomes the poet's dialogue with himself, one part of him wanting to be both physically and poetically safe and secure, but doubting the possibility, the other part of him needing to seek but knowing the danger full well.

2. Empty Image - "The Wild Honey Suckle"

Actively seeking to confront reality, one must take a great risk. Yet something is lost if one does not seek--if one simply sits back and vegetates. He who offers "The Invitation" is aware that if security is lost, perhaps insight is gained.

Whatever the cost of that insight, the cost of ignorance and passivity is greater. The hurricane must be confronted. "The Wild Honey Suckle," which first appeared in July, 1786,[3] approaches the issue from rather a different perspective, but suggests the same basic point, by considering the result of the inability actively to seek:

> Fair flower, that dost so comely grow,
> Hid in this silent dull retreat,
> Untouch'd thy honey'd blossoms blow,
> Unseen thy little branches greet:
> No roving foot shall find thee here,
> No busy hand provoke a tear.
>
> By Nature's self in white array'd,
> She bade thee shun the vulgar eye,
> And planted here the guardian shade,
> And sent soft waters murmuring by;
> Thus quietly thy summer goes,
> Thy days declining to repose.
>
> Smit with these charms, that must decay,
> I grieve to see thy future doom;
> They died -- nor were those flowers less gay,
> The flowers that did in Eden bloom;
> Unpitying frosts, and Autumn's power
> Shall leave no vestige of this flower.
>
> From morning suns and evening dews
> At first, thy little being came:
> If nothing once, you nothing lose,
> For when you die you are the same;
> The space between is but an hour,
> The mere idea of a flower.

The honey suckle grows "hid" in a "silent dull retreat"; "untouch'd" its "honey'd blossoms blow"; "comely," the honey suckle's "little branches" are nonetheless "unseen." In short, this "fair flower" exists in a state of perfect safety and security. "No roving foot shall find thee here, No busy hand provoke a tear."

Consider the nature of this mode of existence. The wild flower simply marks time waiting to die: "planted[in] the guardian shade," with "soft waters murmuring by,. . .quietly" the honey suckle's "summer goes," its "days declining to repose." Unseen, untouched, this flower neither sees nor touches; in repose, it awaits the repose of death. One wonders if death will be any different than life. Implicit here is a clear sense of the startling abruptness of the flower's existence. In the first line of the poem, the honey suckle grows, and by the twelfth line it has already begun "declining to repose." The seasonal progression embodied in the flower's cycle suggests both the naturalness and the inevitability of its brevity. The flower grows in stanza one as spring has come. By stanza two, we learn that already "summer goes". In stanza three, "Autumn's power" is unleashed. Finally, we are forced to consider, in the last stanza, the season "when [the flower will] die," the coming of its "endless winter." By explicitly mentioning summer and autumn, the poet establishes, through grow and die, the rest of the sequence. This sense of natural cycle is also conveyed in the reference to "morning suns and evening dews" which provide the warmth and moisture necessary to sustain the "little being."

Meanwhile, the speaker "grieve[s] to see [the flower's] future doom, for he is "smit with [its] charms, that must decay." He realizes the transience of all beauty and laments that such "charms" must decay inspite of his recognition that they are merely charms and thus lack solidity. Death is certain. Autumn

must always follow summer. Even the flowers that once bloomed in Eden "died--nor were those flowers less gay," says the speaker, emphasizing that there are no exceptions to the rule. Just as ebb tide follows flood , leaving the bank of mud, autumn is followed by the endless winter that chills the soul. Inexorable time, expressed in tide or season, or in morning and evening, brings decay and death.

Facing this dilemma, the honey suckle can do nothing: "If nothing once, you nothing lose,/For when you die you are the same." Between the nothingness preceding its existence and the nothingness following, the honey suckle has "but an hour," and this hour is unused. A "mere idea" because its existence consists in passive fixity, rather than in dynamic activity, the plant's lifetime is merely that stretch of nothingness between ante-nothing and post-nothing. Annihilation is no threat when there is "nothing once" and therefore nothing to annihilate. The phrase "mere idea" suggests that a thing must be translated into concreteness by action in order to have significance, a concept which is supported by the attitudes of many of the narrators of Freneau's poems. Further, the phrase suggests the fact that what is comprehensible is what one does rather than what one thinks, since an <u>idea</u> exists, whether actually or potentially, only in the mind.

So while the speaker laments the flower's doom, he laments also the flower's insignificance. He has established the plant's triviality in saying that it is unseen, untouched, and hidden

in a "silent, dull retreat" and that it shuns "the vulgar eye" in its umbra "of guardian shade." If the flower began as nothing and returns to nothing, there is no great loss. The tragedy is that the hour has been wasted, for the honey suckle has accomplished nothing. Even its frail beauty has been wasted--no one sees but the speaker and he knows that this beauty is hollow and worthless. The very color of the honey suckle--"By Nature's self in white array'd"--reveals its insignificance. In reflecting all colors and absorbing none, white embodies the honey suckle's innocence of all experience. White has traditionally been linked not only with purity but also with death.

The choice of honey suckle may be significant also. The honey suckle is lovely and fragrant, but, uncultivated, it may flourish to choke and kill the shrubs around it. Freneau emphasizes in his title that this is <u>wild</u> honey suckle, and certainly his choice of this instead of some other white flower is suggestive. Perhaps this particular plant is not only worthless but also potentially dangerous. We may, therefore, infer that passivity can be destructive to that which surrounds it. Implicit in the speaker's consideration of the flower's situation, at any rate, is his awareness that the flower is controlled by Nature, and that the flower is capable of being nothing other than what it is. If no one but the speaker enjoys the flower's beauty, the honey suckle's isolation is dictated by the laws of Nature and the laws of chance. The honey suckle is at the mercy of forces beyond the ken of even sentient beings; thus

the speaker does not blame the flower for its inability to escape the "guardian shade" but rather seems to question the Nature which creates and destroys flowers to no intelligible purpose. Man, too, may be at the mercy of forces beyond his ken, but he, at least, has the power to strive to understand his own relationship with those forces.

Whatever Freneau's conscious symbolic intent may have been in choosing honey suckle as his subject, his formal structural intent is clear. Here again the poet employs a departure from an established rime scheme which calls attention unobtrusively to itself in order subtly to emphasize the poem's final statement. Composed of four stanzas of six lines each, "The Wild Honey Suckle" is rimed similarly to "The Hurricane," that is, in alternate line rimes in the first four lines of each stanza and in couplets in the last two-ABABCC. In addition, each couplet is indented. The first 22 lines of the poem progress with new sounds being introduced as expected. However, the last two lines of the poem repeat the couplet rime of the previous stanza-JJ-and thereby create a sense of finality. Several factors combine to lend emphasis to the final statement. First, of course, the couplet of each stanza receives the stanza's emphasis. Then, too, each couplet is indented, and the last couplet contains the poem's only repeated end rime sounds. Finally, those repeated sounds are all two syllable words which must be pronounced as one syllable words in order not to disrupt the poem's metre: power/flower and hour/flower, all of which must be pronounced

to rime with flahr. On the other hand, idea is positioned so that its syllables must be carefully separated in the saying: the metrical stress falls on the second syllable, as it should: i/de/a; but i/de falls in one iamb and a falls in the next. As one of the few three syllable words in the poem, idea is even more emphatic. The combination of these effects, of course, is to stress the fact that the passive flower is a "mere idea."

Freneau's revisions of this final line suggest his awareness of the necessity to control the poem's point of view and may also suggest a final decision to soften the impact of the closing couplet. In the Columbian Herald the line reads "The empty image of a flower"; in 1788 "The mere idea. . .," and in 1795 and 1809 "The frail duration. . . ." This progression seems to dull the initial edge of the line and suggests that the poet's attitude toward this poem, like his attitude towards "The Vanity of Existence," altered slightly and that here he intended to tone down or even obscure his message. The consonance of the original "empty image" calls attention to itself and implies a vacuous mental picture, which like the "mere idea" has no reality of its own, but exists only in the mind of the perceiver. "Mere Idea" also calls attention, as we have noted, to the reaction of the observer to the wild honey suckle, and stresses the flower's lack of essential solidity and concreteness, and thus significance. The final version, "frail duration," puts the flower's existence outside of the mind of the observer

by removing image and idea. The effect is both to stress that the flower's independent existence is transient and to remove reference to the flower's existence as a function of the speaker's consciousness. In fact, in this last version, the speaker refers to himself only in lines 17 and 18, where he states his reaction to the impending doom of the honey suckle and associates his own fate with that of the flower. Notice, however, that he keeps himself at a distance. Unlike the narrator of "The Dying Elm," who ultimately becomes most concerned with his own transience, the narrator of this poem is an outside observer who is interested in the flower's transience and in its implications for himself, but who is emotionally detached. Although he says he grieves, his grief does not overwhelm him and he reports his impressions of the experience in a controlled, even way. The speaker seems to have accepted the brevity of his own existence as an immutable aspect of his own nature. If he "grieves to see [the flower's] future doom," perhaps he does so because he recognizes the flower's inability to do anything meaningful before its annihilation.

While "The Wild Honey Suckle" is clearly outside of the melancholy tradition to which it has been assigned,[14] Freneau's departure from received tradition is based more in his philosophic rejection of the afterlife than in his rejection of a particular poetic convention. "Autumn's power/Shall leave no vestige of this flower." No vestige, nothing shall remain. "If nothing once you nothing lose/For when you die you are the

same," nothing. Believing that death is the end of all existence, the poet offers no consolation in a divine plan.

Objectively considered, the questions of the specific intent of Freneau's choice of honey suckle and the more broadly pertinent questions of his attempts to distance himself, in this case by modulating the impact of a key passage, are debatable. However, given the poet's observable tendencies, one may, I think, support the contention that he does these things consciously. His control of the poem is observable even in its sound structure. The dominant vowel sounds are again the mournful long o and oo sounds of grow, blow, goes, repose, and gloom, doom, dews, lose, and these sounds support the speaker's grief. The poem is packed, moreover, with sibilants and near-sibilants such as these: "fair flower that dost so. . ."; "This silent,"; "nature's self"; "she bade thee shun the shade"; and "shall leave no vestige of this flower." The effect is a calming, lulling hush appropriate to the setting and to the tone of the speaker. We are in a "silent, dull retreat," hushed in the isolation of "soft waters," and are contemplating calmly.

Even the poet's diction suggests his careful attempt to emphasize the final stanza. Until line 21, the flower is referred to by thee or thy: "Thy little branches"; "She bade thee shun. . .;" for example. In line 21 the poet forsakes this artificial formality and shifts to the more natural you, ". . . you nothing lose/For when you die you are the same," a tactic that effectively stresses the poem's conclusion and its levels

of meaning. The artifice of "fair flower, that dost so comely grow" has become, by the end of the poem, the straight-forward "The space between is but an hour/The mere idea of a flower."

Thus the brief chance to become a meaningful something is lost, and the flower remains a void. Of course the implication is that the space between must not be wasted. In a universe governed by forces beyond our ken and where we are empty images, or mere ideas whose duration is frail and brief, we must act; we must strive; and we must seek--if we would avoid nothingness. Conversely, the doom of the wild honey suckle represents the plight of those of us who are consigned to the guardian shade, where repose is the death in life of those who are unable or unwilling to accept the invitation to face reality. Hence this repose is not a recreation of self but a denial of self. Faced with the prospect of the honey suckle, the poet chooses to sally forth and confront, realizing that his own nature makes this choice possible.

3. <u>And Summer Frolics O'er Her Tomb</u> - "May to April"

Freneau often employs the seasonal cycle as a metaphor for the life of man, as he does in "The Wild Honey Suckle." However, the poet does not use the device as a means of suggesting that man, like the seasons, can expect new life to follow death. First published on the same day as "The Departure;" April 18, 1787, "May to April"[5] relies on a basic irony for its impact. May, a month which represents for us the new life of spring, depends on the death of April for its own fecundity.

April showers bring May flowers; April's death brings the brief life of May. The situation is not unlike that seen in "The Vernal Ague," except that here the poet is more fully detached from the poem's persona. The speaker of "May to April" is the sardonic and clear-seeing May, whereas the speaker of "The Vernal Ague" is the aguish seeker of delusion. In "May to April," life and death are juxtaposed and death's inevitability is thereby underscored.

Without your showers
I breed no flowers,
Each field a barren waste appears;
If you don't weep
My blossoms sleep,
They take such pleasure in your tears.

As your decay
Made room for May,
So I must part with all that's mine;
My balmy breeze,
My blooming trees,
To torrid suns their sweets resign.

For April dead
My shades I spread,
To her I owe my dress so gay;
Of daughters three
It falls on me
To close our triumphs on one day.

Thus to repose
All Nature goes;
Month after month must find its doom:
Time on the wing
May ends the Spring,
And Summer frolics o'er her tomb.

May speaks to April, acknowledging the debt she owes. "Without your showers/I breed no flowers" is turned ironically into "If you don't weep/My flowers sleep." May emphasizes her reliance on April: April's tears give May life. The melancholy

destiny of April is May's necessity; thus her blossoms "take such pleasure" in April's tears. One's pleasure is the result of the other's pain since the eternal sleep of May is forestalled by the weeping of April.

Just as April must die in order to prepare for May, so too must May end. "As your decay/Made room for May,/So I must part with all that's mine," May says. The processes of life and death continue unabated. The "torrid suns" of summer, ironically a time of fruition, will finally steal the "balmy breeze" and "blooming trees" of May. Just as May would offer nothing but "barren waste" without April's tears, June requires May's "sweets." May is not, in this poem, therefore, so much the expected representation of life as the representation of death. The tension between life and death is embodied in May's reliance for its existence on April's death and in summer's subsequent reliance likewise on May's death. Life is implicitly the product of death in that the last day of May "closes" the "triumphs" of Spring.

And the end of all life is death: "Thus to repose/All nature goes." These lines recall the fate of the honey suckle, whose days decline "to repose" quickly. Each month will inevitably find its doom:

> Time on the Wing
> May ends the Spring,
> And Summer frolics o'er her tomb.

The radical irony of this final line underscores that of the rest of the poem. May gaily gives thanks to April's tears--

now summer will likewise "frolic" on the "tomb" of May.

The incongruity of life with death and the juxtaposition of our expectations of life in spring with the poet's insistence that we acknowledge the role of death in the process are strengthened by the poem's structure. First, the poem rhetorically is part of a dialogue between May and April. May openly acknowledges her debt to April. Note that the very names are ironic: May is taken from the Roman deity Maia, a goddess of fertility associated with spring, and one of the seven Pleiades; April refers to Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, who is also associated with fertility. Both life and beauty, like May and April, are transient.

A more solemn tone might be expected in a poem which is so preoccupied with death, yet the six line stanzas of "May to April" each contain, alternately, two sets of two 4 syllable lines and one 8 syllable line. The two short lines rime couplet style, and the longer lines also rime: AABCCB. The effects of this structure are several. First, the resultant metre is rather more rollicking than solemn, as might befit the poem's subject matter. A jarring tone results from this incongruity, a tone which reinforces the clash between spring and death.

Second, the metrical quickness of the short lines is absorbed in the longer lines; that is, the short lines tend to lead into the longer lines, thereby emphasizing their length and causing them to be read slowly. These lines are further emphasized by being set several spaces closer to the left margin than the shorter lines. Third, the rime scheme tends to

turn the last line of each stanza back into the stanza, thus creating a subtle sense of finality. Each stanza is one sentence, the main point of which lies in the closing line. The final line of the poem, linked with the rest of the poem by and, which emphasizes its relationship with the overall process, receives the greatest stress, because of its position, of the retarded metre and the inward turning rime--"And summer frolics o'er her tomb." In its personification of May, April, and Summer, the poem's irony is almost acid. May is consciously aware that she relies for her existence on the sorrow of April, yet she acknowledges her pleasure in April's tears. For her, they are the waters of life. Likewise, because Summer realizes that she relies on May's death, selfishly she frolics on May's tomb. May clearly places her priority on her own needs--April be damned. Summer regards May in exactly the same way. As we have noted, even the names tend to reinforce the poem's sense of the ironically incongruous. The effect of the rime and metre is to reinforce the bizarre concept of Summer's cruelly dancing on May's tomb.

Freneau tones the poem down somewhat in the later editions, but its edge is dulled only somewhat. Originally the final line read "And Summer--triumphs o'er her tomb!" The dash emphasizes triumphs, and the exclamation point suggests summer's excitement and delight at her triumph. The '88 version drops the punctuation and substitutes frolics, which, as we have seen, heightens the sardonic quality of the poem's tone. The exclama-

tion is unnecessary since Summer is no longer merely triumphant but is now rather transported with delight at May's death. This transport is now effectively understated. In the final versions, '95 and '09, frolics becomes dances, which still conveys the sense of delight, but not so strongly as before.

This softening of the poem's tone is also evident in the poet's rearrangement of the stanzaic structure of the final versions. The dimetre lines are combined into tetrametre lines which rime internally, so:

> Without your showers, I breed no flowers,
> Each field a barren waste appears;
> If you don't weep, my blossoms sleep,
> They take such pleasure in your tears

The effect of the internal rime is still to quicken the first and third lines, and perhaps to accentuate the slowness and evenness of the second and fourth lines of each stanza. However, if such is the case, the stress is less marked. Moreover, while the internally rimed lines tend to read quickly, the rollicking quality of the metre is somewhat subdued when compared to that of the original version. Note, too, that the revised version spaces all four lines of each stanza equidistant from the left margin. Overall, the tone of the revised poem is not as strongly reinforced by its structure as was the original version's. The poet seems to have chosen to soften the poem's impact, perhaps deciding that the original tone is too strident. As does "The Wild Honey Suckle," "May to April" examines a natural process but this time through the voice of a component of that process. Freneau's handling of the poem

reveals that, though he still questions the cruelty inherent in the natural cycle, he has begun to understand and to accept his inability to change things. The processes of living and dying are, after all, "but the custom" of Nature.

4. Shadows and Delusions - "The Indian Burying Ground"

In his comments on "The Indian Burying Ground,"[6] Lewis Leary asserts that Freneau "was a poet, not a thinker."[7] Nevertheless, the poet's thought has been the focus of much of the considerable amount of critical attention the poem has received. H. M. Campbell argues that in "The Indian Burying Ground" Freneau is indicating his belief that the sitting posture in which the Indian corpse is placed is more appropriate than the reclining "posture we give the dead" because it suggests the soul's activity, an activity in which both cultures believe.[8] Nelson Adkins argues, on the other hand, that the poem is an example that "Freneau's doubts regarding the future life" were persistent, and cites the opening lines of the poem as "veiled expressions of doubt."[9] George Wasserman notes first that the poem strikes a "balance between rationalism and anti-rationalism" but ends by claiming that Freneau is saying that "reason alone is unable to explain the life of the soul after death."[10] However, Martin E. Itzkowitz argues a radical position for the poet: "Freneau's locus of values must necessarily lie in the realm of present existence. . . for Freneau, the dead remain static," he says.[11]

Of these four views of "The Indian Burying Ground," the

last seems the most persuasive and may explain why the poet attempts to identify a mode of living that may give our brief duration meaning. We learn here that both reason and fancy are necessary to our perception of the nature of life and death, but that even art cannot be expected to endure. However, "The Indian Burying Ground" may offer an implicit statement of what we may do in order to understand our situation and live purposefully nonetheless.

> In spite of all the learn'd have said
> I still my old opinion keep;
> The posture that we give the dead
> Points out the soul's eternal sleep.
>
> Not so the ancients of these lands; --
> The Indian, when from life releas'd,
> Again is seated with his friends,
> And shares again the joyous feast.
>
> His imag'd birds, and painted bowl,
> And ven'son, for a journey drest,
> Bespeak the nature of the soul,
> Activity, that wants no rest.
>
> His bow for action ready bent,
> And arrows, with a head of bone,
> Can only mean that life is spent,
> And not the finer essence gone.
>
> Thou, stranger, that shalt come this way,
> No fraud upon the dead commit,
> Yet, mark the swelling turf, and say,
> They do not lie, but here they sit.
>
> Here, still a lofty rock remains,
> On which the curious eye may trace
> (Now wasted half by wearing rains)
> The fancies of a ruder race.
>
> Here, still an aged elm aspires,
> Beneath whose far projecting shade
> (And which the shepherd still admires)
> The children of the forest play'd.

There oft a restless Indian queen
(Pale Marian with her braided hair)
And many a barbarous form is seen
To chide the man that lingers there.

By midnight moons, o'er moistening dews,
In vestments for the chase array'd,
The hunter still the deer pursues,
The hunter and the deer -- a shade.

And long shall timorous Fancy see
The painted chief, and pointed spear,
And reason's self shall bow the knee
To shadows and delusions here.

The opening stanza of the poem establishes the ground of conflict. The "learn'd have said," of course, that the soul is reborn into a new, spiritual, mode of existence through the death of the body. The speaker of the poem, however, holds his own "old opinion" that the posture that we give the dead"--we being westerners and Christians--"Points out the soul's eternal sleep." Note that this is an old opinion of the speaker's, not some sudden conclusion to which he has lightly leapt. We may infer that the speaker's belief, therefore, is a considered one, one which has been mulled over and tested. For him the reclining posture given the corpse is entirely apropos. He knows that the corpse will sleep eternally.

However, he recognizes that, aside from the "learn'd," there are others with whom he differs. "The ancients of these lands" when they die are "again. . .seated with. . .friends/ And share again the joyous feast." Indeed the Indian goes completely outfitted with "his imag'd birds, and painted bowl. . . ven'son for a journey drest [and] his bow for action ready bent/And arrows. . . ." These articles "bespeak the nature

of the soul," in the belief of the Indian, "Activity, that wants no rest." The bow, bent ready for action, symbolizes for the Indian that only "life is spent/And not the finer essence gone." The soul then, if the soul is the "finer essence," passes to another mode of existence, one which, for the Indian, is much like that of this life. The speaker, though, chooses not to concur with the Indian Sagamores, or with the "learn'd" either. The poet's choice of words, of course, suggests this disagreement. First, the corpse is placed in a posture--the word is italicized for emphasis and may connote pose, its root. Such a connotation would suggest the essential meaninglessness of the position in which the corpse is placed, since, for the speaker, once the body is dead, we may as well bury it standing up. Second, the dead Indian has been "releas'd" from life, a phrase which suggests that he has been held a kind of prisoner in this life. Yet he takes with him all the paraphernalia of his present existence. Since the future life is a release, the gear of this life is unneeded. Third, the poet revises "finer essence" in line 16 to read "old ideas" in 1809. The speaker's reference to a "finer essence" implies, plainly, his belief that such a thing exists. Apparently the poet decided not to suggest that such a belief be associated with the speaker--the revision instead associates the practice of packing the dead brave's bow and arrows, and bowl, off with him with "old" ways of thinking. These are not "old opinions," the beliefs of an individual, but "old ideas," the

inherited beliefs of the culture. The "ancients" and the "learn'd" cling to their respective traditional notions of the soul's life after death, but these are notions which will neither withstand the analysis of reason nor be verified by the productions of fancy. Finally, the speaker has already clearly stated his position anyway: death is "the soul's eternal sleep."

Still, the speaker, while choosing not so to believe, chooses to respect the beliefs of the "ancients of this land." To us he directs an injunction, "Thou, stranger. . .no fraud upon the dead commit." Instead, he urges, recognize their point of view for what it is and when you "mark the swelling turf. . .say/They do not lie, but here they sit." The speaker's attitude, though detached and ironic, is flexible. Although he disagrees, he will not blindly criticize even an idea which for him is untenable. He goes so far, moreover, as to remind us to be open minded too. Lie is an ironic pun in stanza five linked with fraud. Indeed, the Indians do not lie. They sit there as proof that they have acted so as to support their belief in what they practice. Somehow the truth of an assertion may be tested by its being acted upon. The irony, of course, is that, though the corpses sit, no one here can know if elsewhere they are active. Their sitting posture may be a lie to which they themselves are oblivious.

Yet here in the burying ground stands a reminder that belief in immortality is a delusion. On a "lofty rock" are

painted "the fancies of a ruder race." The scene on the rock seems to include "pale Marian. . .a restless Indian queen. . . and many a barbarous form." Across the rock's face "by midnight moons, o'er moistening dews/In vestments for the chase array'd/The hunter still the deer pursues." If the painting could survive to represent the stories of the pale queen and the hunter and the deer, then perhaps our belief in their existence in some future life could be sustained. Art immortalizes, we think, yet already the "fancies" on the rock are "wasted half by wearing rains." They do not endure, but are as transient as those whose lives they depict. The artistic productions of man seem to be no more permanent than he is.

"Here" the "lofty rock" stands under "an aged elm. . . beneath whose far projecting shade" the forest children, the Indians, once played. The elm, of course, is the tree of dreams; its shade is the dimness of illusion, "far projecting" because it is so difficult to elude. The painting on the rock is part of the elm's projected illusions, "the hunter and the deer--a shade." Perhaps their playing in the elm's shade had deluded the forest children into thinking that they would live on after dying.

Even "the shepherd still admires" the aged elm and its shade. We wonder who this shepherd is and why he admires the elm. First, the term <u>admire</u> seems to connote its root," to wonder at," rather than the usual modern usage "to have a high opinion of." The shepherd marvels and wonders at the powers of illusion which the elm possesses, perhaps because he realizes

that fantasy is a necessary part of our existence. Even reason, as we shall see, must "bow the knee" to delusions at certain times. The shepherd's identity is still a puzzle. He is not one of the Indians, nor is he one of the learn'd. He is one who recognizes the elm's remarkable powers--note that "which. . ." is a dangling modifier referring ambiguously to both elm and shade. Whoever he is, he observes, with the poem's speaker, the powers of the elm.

"Still" the elm "aspires," and the "fancies" are only "half wasted." Their charms are thus likely to continue to work. Therefore the speaker closes with the observation that "long shall timorous Fancy see/The painted chief, and pointed spear." The power of the elm is so great, its shade so "far-projecting," and our desire to believe in immortality is so strong, that "reason's self" itself will bow the knee/To shadows and delusions here."

Several elements are at work in "The Indian Burying Ground" interwoven with each other and with the poem's discussion of the afterlife: the dichotomy between appearance and reality is examined in the motif of shades; the nature of art is explored in the painting motif; and the nature of the imagination and its relationship to reason is considered in the juxtaposition of "Fancy" and "reason's self."

The only repeated end rime sound in the poem is the long a and d sound of shade/play'd; array'd/shade, and shade is therefore the only end rime word repeated. Shade is emphasized in

order to call the deluding powers of the elm to our attention. What appears to be may not be when we play under the shade of the branches where we find the picture of "pale Marian" and of the "chase." The "restless Indian queen" is as much a shade, a ghost--delusion, as are the hunter and the deer, who, for the time being anyway, plunge on through their imaginary forest. Yet even in the shade, time passes as "midnight moons and moistening dews" come and go. Appearances--shadows and delusions--are fleeting. Shadows links, in their root relationship, shades explicitly with delusions. Under the painting ironically, is a rock, something we would associate with permanence. However, like a bank of mud, it can be worn away by the action of erosion. "Wearing Rains," we must realize, will eventually eat away even the rock itself.

The poet clarifies the relative positions of the elements described in stanzas six through ten by locating them with the adverbs here and there. Here seems to indicate the present location of all the elements in the poem; here in the burying ground are the rock, the elm, the speaker. There seems to indicate the elements included in the painting on the rock, including the Indian queen, "many a barbarous form," and the hunter and the deer. Here introduces stanzas six and seven and closes stanza ten, the poem's last, while there opens and closes stanza eight. The juxtaposition of the terms not only locates the physical position of the elements described but may also suggest the relative functions of reason and fancy. Here is the physi-

cal world, the world of reason and there is the world of delusion, the world of fancy.

The dead brave is accompanied at his "joyous feast" by "imag'd birds" and his "painted bowl." The burial ground where he is set to rest has as its central feature a "lofty rock" which bears the painting of the queen and the chase. By night and day the chase continues and the queen is restless, but the key to the painting's meaning lies in the fact that already it is half "wasted." The "imag'd birds" and "painted bowl," too, if left to the elements, would fade. Although art may simulate reality, reality is not absolute and stable. As time changes all things, so, perhaps, time changes what is real. The "imag'd birds" are not permanent and neither is the rock painting of the chase because both are products of the fancy. Even though the elm "aspires" and the rock is "lofty," that is, even though the purpose and intent of art are noble, the images will fade.

Implicit in this realization must be, for the poet, the awareness that if the painted images are not permanent, neither then are his poems. They, too, are painted images of a sort, ideas brought forth out of the mind and made concrete. But they too, in attempting to simulate reality, capture a moment which is transient. The honey suckle will last only a "frail duration." That which the paintings "bespeak," that which they attempt to capture but cannot, is that which is ultimately meaningful: "Activity, that wants no rest." Only the striving

to create and thereby to understand seems to have value. This sense that somehow the apprehension of reality lies in the process of creative striving seems to be supported in the poet's practice of his continual revisions of his poems so that they do not become static, and in "The Indian Burying Ground" in the tension between fancy and reason. Unfortunately, the terms are not clearly defined within the framework of the poem, so that any meanings which the reader would assign to them would perhaps be arbitrary. However, "Fancy" is associated, through "fancies" (l. 24), with the creative process and with delusion: the "imag'd birds," the "painted bowl" indirectly, and the scene on the rock directly. Fancy tells us that the soul exists in some future life. Fancy is "timorous" perhaps because of its ability to grasp realizations which are beyond the reach of reason. Perhaps fancy is fearful because of the breadth of its power to imagine the varieties of experience which death may offer. Without fancy, perceptions of the reality which defies reason are impossible.

Reason, on the other hand, is what fancy is not. Reason appears to be attached to the empirical experiences rather than to the apprehension of dream or illusion. Reason tells us that there is no evidence of an afterlife; however--"reason's self shall bow the knee/To shadows and delusions here," under the tree of dreams. The "far-projecting" shades of the tree of illusion so pervade our existence that perhaps reason need learn to accomodate itself to fancy.

Both reason and fancy are capable of being deluded, as we have seen in "Pictures of Columbus." Yet both faculties appear to have an important function for the speaker. Rationally, he rejects any significance for the sitting posture of the corpse, and points out that art is not immortal and must "wear away," but he admits, nevertheless, that here, in this physical world, "reason's self shall bow the knee." Perhaps there are situations in which reason is inadequate, situations in which "shadows and delusions" are recognizable by reason but comprehensible only through the power of fancy. Yet reason is still necessary, for the speaker does not reject it--"reason's self" does not flee before delusion--but rather seems to attempt to come into balance with fancy. In attempting to understand death--in attempting, in fact, to grasp the human condition--reason may be able to penetrate the delusions, but perhaps fancy is necessary to allow us to understand them. In the '95 edition of the poem Freneau deletes the capital letter on "Fancy" and the italics on "reason's self" perhaps to suggest that the two should be in balance.

Over-simplifying, we might exemplify the process of balancing reason and fancy as follows. Reason tells us, through our empirical experience with phenomena, that we, like April and May, are transient. Of this we have ample concrete evidence, but none to support the notion of a life after death. Fancy enables us to organize the elements of our rational apprehension into a medium--a poem, a painting--through which we may examine

the nature of our resultant existence. Fancy seems to be, for Freneau, the mythopoeic power that creates the delusion of "golden age" and afterlife, but fancy also seems to be essential to him. Once we apprehend rationally the fact that we are doomed to "eternal sleep," we must find a way to give meaning to our brief existence, as the honey suckle cannot. This significance may be achieved through the creative striving of art, even though art, too, is transient, and reason may expose its illusory essence. The "activity, that wants no rest" is its own value, not the product of that activity. In other words, the end does not justify the means; the means justifies itself.

5. Learn Wisdom From The Falling Leaf - "The Man of Ninety"

Having lived a long time, the man of 90 has observed that he and the oak have much in common. Yet, though both are "natives of one verdant plain," one will live on after the other has died. Though the man's life is long, the tree's is longer, and the old man looks upon the tree as both the symbol of life and the symbol of his own frustration and doom.

Sir James Frazier did the pioneer work on the connection between dying heroes and fertility, and Carl Jung after him recognized the prominence of the tree. For example, Osiris is buried in a tree; Adonis born of one; Attis, Odin, and Jesus are hanged on trees. Balder is killed by the mistletoe from a tree, and Dionysos, who carves a phallus out of a fig tree, was called in Boetia "he in the tree."[12] "Jung saw in the association of hero and tree the sacred burial of the hero in

the great mother--the tree being the world tree with its roots in the depths of man's unconscious mind," according to David Leeming.[13]

Alan Watts interprets the tree similarly:

> The symbolism of the tree is quite clearly the world. Life itself having its stem rooted in the unknown. Its branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit form the multiplicity of creatures--'I am the vine, ye are the branches'--which blossom from the ever-fertile source of life. The wood of the tree is matter, prima materia, out of which all things are made.[14]

Whether the conscious or unconscious significance of this particular white oak can be so verbalized is uncertain. However, we do know that for the man of ninety the oak represents strength, longevity, and security. This tree is, the narrator says, "His tree." The poet's interest in tree symbolism, seen before in "The Dying Elm" and "The Indian Burying Ground" and again in "On The Fall of An Ancient Oak Tree,"[15] is well established.[16] Clearly the oak is here a symbol of strength and endurance: its roots spreading into the ground come perhaps to represent our own grip on life.

"The Man of Ninety,"[17] which first appeared in the 1788 edition, uses the tree in a traditional symbolic context. Indeed, the belief that spirits dwell in trees is worldwide, and among primitive tribes even today trees are regarded as tribal ancestors or as the abode of spirits or souls which enter the womb to become babies. The life of the newborn is sometimes supposed to be bound to that of a newly planted tree, much like the man of ninety associates his own life with that of the

oak.

Conversely, this poem uses motifs of water and burial in ways which are ironic reversals of the ways in which they are traditionally used. Water is traditionally a symbol of life, a life-giving agent, the source of life and rebirth, while burial in the earth, of course, is associated with death--ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Indeed, the imagery functions here in ways which are consistent with the association which Freneau establishes elsewhere. Water is destructive and threatening, while land is secure and safe. Moreover, the poet introduces into this tension between two primal elements--water and earth --a concern with the tension between nature and art.

"To yonder boughs that spread so wide,
Beneath whose shade soft waters glide,
Once more I take the well known way;
With feeble step and tottering knee
I sigh to reach my WHITE-OAK tree,
Where rosy health was wont to play.

If to the grave, consuming slow,
The shadow of myself, I go,
When I am gone wilt thou remain!--
From dust you rose, and grew like me;
I man became, and you a tree,
Both natives of one verdant plain.

How much alike; yet not the same!
You could no kind protector claim;
Alone you stood to chance resign'd;
When winter came, with blustering sky,
You fear'd its blasts--and so did I,
And for warm suns in secret pin'd.

When vernal suns began to glow
You felt returning vigour flow,
   Which once a year new leaves supply'd;
Like you, fine days I wish'd to see,
And May was a sweet month to me,
   But when November came--I sigh'd!

If through your bark some rustic arm
A mark impress'd, you took the alarm,
   And tears awhile I saw descend;
Till Nature's kind maternal aid
A plaister on your bruises laid,
   And bade your trickling sorrows end.

Like you, I fear'd the lightning's stroke
Whose flame dissolves the strength of oak,
   And ends at once this mortal dream;--
You saw with grief the soil decay
That from your roots was torn away;
   You sigh'd--and curs'd the stream.

With borrow'd earth, and busy spade,
Around your roots new life I laid,
   While joy reviv'd in every vein;
Once more that stream shall death impart!
Though Nature owns the aid of art,
   No art, immortal, makes her reign.

How much alike our fortune--say--
Yet, why must I so soon decay
   When thou hast scarcely reach'd thy prime--
Erect and tall you joyous stand;
The staff of age has found my hand,
   That guides me to the grave of time.

Could I, fair tree, like you, resign,
And banish all these fears of mine,
   Grey hairs would be no cause of grief:
Your blossoms die, but you remain,
Your fruit lies scatter'd o'er the plain--
   Learn wisdom from the falling leaf.

As you survive, by heaven's decree,
Let wither'd flowers be thrown on me,
   Sad compensation for my doom,
While Christmas greens and gloomy pines,
And cedars dark, and barren vines,
   Point out the lonely tomb.

The enlivening sun, that burns so bright,
Ne'er had a noon without a night,
So LIFE and DEATH agree;
The joys of man by years are broke--"
'Twas thus the man of ninety spoke,
Then rose, and left his tree.

The opening stanzas establish the relationship between the man and the oak. The old man's visit to the oak is a customary one; he takes "the well known way" to its wide spreading boughs. His "feeble steps. . ., tottering knee," and his "sighs" now succeed the rosy health of former times. Now he dwells on the contrast between himself and the tree. Both rose "from dust. . . and grew" yet one became man and one became tree and one goes to the grave while the other will remain yet awhile. "How much alike, yet not the same" they are. Neither had a "kind protector"; both stood alone "to chance resigned"; both feared the "blasts" of winter's "blustering sky" and both "for warm suns in secret pin'd." Passing years have brought the man's gradual deterioration, yet each spring the tree has been renewed. This renewal is emphasized by being illustrated in two ways in the poem. After winter's blasts, the season of "vernal suns" always brings the "returning vigour" which supplies "new leaves." Moreover, if "some rustic arm" should scar the oak, "Nature's kind maternal aid" lays "a plaister" on the oak's "bruises" to end its "trickling sorrows." Man's own regenerative powers are not mentioned: the man of ninety feels too sorry for himself, in his old age, to recall that his own body has no doubt felt the healing touch of nature, too. He forgets also that he is himself unusually long-lived.

But other forces as well threaten the tree, the "lightning's stroke/whose flame dissolves the strength of oak" and the stream. The elemental forces of fire and water are beyond the tree's power to defend itself. Being struck by lightning "would end this mortal dream" for either the tree or the old man. The speaker consistently personifies the oak--it sheds tears; it fears the lightning, for example--in order to strengthen his association with it. This association is strengthened by the old man's care of the oak. Erosion could destroy the tree, and would have, had not the man intervened, but with "borrowed earth and busy spade" the aged one "laid new life around [the] roots" of the tree, replacing that soil which the tree had seen "decay," and which had been "torn away" by the stream. He projects his own self-centered reaction on- to the tree when he says, "You sigh'd-and cursed the stream," but we will recall that it is he who sighs (stanza one). "Once more that stream shall death impart!" the man of ninety asserts in stanza seven, suggesting that his efforts will ultimately be in vain.

Still, he has saved the tree by reburying its exposed roots. One wonders, however, why the earth is "borrowed," since <u>borrowed</u> not only conveys the sense that the soil is appropriated for this specific use, but also conveys the sense that the soil will at some time return whence it came. Thus the protection it affords the oak's roots is temporary. The stream of time incessantly carries away the earth in which men attempt to root.

However, the poet softens the implicit trans ience of "borrowed earth" by revising line 40 in the '95 edition to read, "The care of man shall life impart." So the ministrations of man can have an effect, though brief, in allaying those awesome powers of nature which are eventually destructive.

The final sentence of stanza seven is a conclusion based upon the previous series of illustrations:

> Though Nature owns the aid of art,
> No art, immortal, makes her reign.

This statement, though rhetorically conclusive, is syntactically ambiguous. Does nature own in the sense of possessing, the aid of art, or does nature own, in the sense of acknowledging, the aid of art? If the former is the case, then art is part of nature; if the latter, then art functions independently of nature. Since commas set off immortal, the term may be an adjective modifying art, a noun in apposition with art, or a term of direct address referring to the oak. Of course the latter seems unlikely, but all three possibilities would be grammatically correct. Make is also used ambiguously. Does art fashion or create "her reign?" Does art compel "her reign?" Further, it is unclear to whom her refers, whether to nature or to art. We know that nature has been described as maternal, justifying the feminine pronoun, but the nearest noun to her is art, the subject of the main clause in which her occurs.

Syntactically, the sentence is dense, and there is little in the poem outside of this statement to supply a clue as to how it should be interpreted. Again, I would suggest that

syntactical complexity suggests an ambiguity which is the result of the problem itself. Whatever the relationship between nature and the art is, that relationship hardly seems to be an absolute, unambiguous one. Nature is associated here with a kind of permanence, not absolute stasis, of course, but the permanence of the cycle of death and renewal. The existence of natural phenomena is transient, but the cycle which renews and replaces these phenomena is stable and reliable. Nature, unlike art, is, in a way, immortal. Art, on the other hand, is associated with man, whose individual transience is not redeemed by the natural cycle. The speaker, like many of Freneau's personae, sees no evidence in the cycle that he will be renewed. No art is immortal--the effects of borrowed earth and busy spade, like the painting of pale Marian, the hunter and the deer, will ultimately be washed away. Yet art does help to fend off the ultimate doom, to postpone, somehow, the inevitable. In effect, nature owns--controls--the "aid of art" in that ultimately art does not change nature's course; yet nature owns--admits--the power of art to intercede for man. Art becomes, then, a mediator between man and death, but since art is itself transient, its creator must seek constantly to renew it. Perhaps this need for renewal explains why Freneau continuously revised his poems. Through art we may continue to sink our roots into the earth which sustains us--"The care of man shall life impart."

Stanzas eight, nine, and ten reiterate the old man's consciousness of his similarity to the tree and suggest that he may realize his own selfishness. "How much alike our fortune," he cries; "Yet I must so soon decay." While the oak "joyous stands," "erect and tall," he laments, "The staff of age has found [his] hand." However, if he could "resign" himself, like the tree, "and banish all these fears," perhaps he could "learn wisdom from the falling leaf." Through all of this the tree stands unmoved, detached; the man's ultimate problem is the curse of his own consciousness and his inability to accept his own nature. While he is aware of his own doom, the tree is not. Perhaps, on one hand, the wisdom of the falling leaf is to scatter "fruit. . .o'er the plain" and to hope that some lives on. The tree is productive, awaiting the day when its acorns will themselves become oaks. Yet the tree itself will ultimately die, as has each fallen leaf. On the other hand, perhaps the wisdom of the falling leaf is that we all die alone and separated. The old man's reason tells him that he too must die, but his self-pity renders him incapable of accepting that plight and he closes with a maudlin outburst: "Let wither'd flowers be thrown on me. . .the joys of man by years are broke." Ironically, the plants with which he would "point out the lonely tomb" are traditional symbols of life--"Christmas greens," "pines," and "cedars." His projection makes them "gloomy" and "dark" and makes the vines he mentions "barren." Thus he is aware that he is mortal, but

consumed by his awareness and unable rationally to accept his mortality.

Ironically, his last words implicitly recognize the cycle of life and death which he refuses steadfastly to accept.

> The enlivening sun, that burns so bright,
> Ne'er had a noon without a night.

His concern is with "the joys of man" and hardly with a reasonable acceptance of the natural processes. The poet subtly stresses this self-centered attitude by causing the man of ninety to refer to himself in the first person in every stanza of the poem except the last. The speaker refers to himself in the nominative no fewer than 13 times, in the objective no fewer than 5 times, and in the possessive no fewer than 3 times. In this poem of 66 lines, the speaker refers to himself in the first person on an average of once every three lines. In order to gauge the degree to which this self-concern permeates the poem, compare the number of times the speaker of "The Wild Honey Suckle" refers to himself--only once. In the earlier poem, of course, the concern is with the object and its significance. Here, as the title suggests, the speaker's concern is only secondary with the tree; the subtitle is "Or, A Visit To the Oak."

Moreover, the poem's dominant rime sounds further emphasize the degree to which the speaker is self-oriented. The end rime sound of long e occurs in stanzas 1, 2, 4, 10, and 11. The only repeated end rime words in the poem are tree, in stanza

1, 2, and 11; and me, in stanzas 2, 4, and 10. While the effect of the repeated end rimes is to unify the poem and to associate tree and me, the effect is more strongly to stress the speaker's maudlin self consciousness.

The final two lines of the poem provide its frame. A detached narrator now ends the poem in a manner reminiscent of the closing of "The Dying Indian." Like Shalum, the man of ninety is a persona created to allow the poet to probe the character of a particular type of human being. Nonetheless, the contrast between the two personae is stark: whereas the Indian is stoic and accepting, the man of ninety seems bitter and self-pitying. He is not so self-concerned, perhaps, as the speaker of "The Dying Elm," but he is more like that individual than he is like Shalum. By closing the old man's monologue with this narrator, the poet makes clear that he is detached from the poem's persona. We must consider, then, that our attention is called to the examination of the behavior of a created character, not to the self-conscious theatricality of a melancholy poet.

The man of ninety would benefit if he could accept "the wisdom of the falling leaf." Another of Freneau's narrators puts it thusly:

> While onward moves each circling year
> Thy mandates, Nature, all obey,
> As with this moving changeful sphere
> The seasons change and never stay. . . .[18]

These lines imply that the key to a meaningful existence lies in the recognition that there are forces beyond our ken and that we should concern ourselves with what we can influence. I believe that the poet suggests that we can control the quality of our own lives. The "activity, that wants no rest" may be, for the poet, the creation of his poetry, a creation which, in its striving to grasp the ungraspable, is of value in itself. Though that which we create with borrowed earth and busy spade is impermanent, the act of its creation is nonetheless worthwhile.

"Nature Owns The Aid of Art" - Conclusion

Since The Miscellaneous Works of 1788 was published so close on the heels of Freneau's Poems of 1786, one is not surprised that the poetry of the later work bears many similarities, both technical and philosophic, to that of the earlier work. As we have noted, the poet employs a variety of approaches in conveying his themes. Moreover, he continues to focus effectively on the concrete and the particular, as in "The Wild Honey Suckle," and to choose the effective image, as in "The Indian Burying Ground," in order to make concrete the situations he examines. In addition, we see that he took careful pains in the revisions of these poems in order to hone their meanings as sharply as possible and that he has distanced himself effectively as well. However, the distance which the poet achieves and his growing concern for the tensions between reason and

fancy and between nature and art probably signal the difference between the poems of 1786 and those of 1788. Freneau seems to have achieved control over his vision of life through a clearer understanding of himself and his art.

"The Pictures of Columbus" opens the 1788 edition aptly in that it introduces, through its subthemes, the major concerns of the rest of the volume. Examination of the dichotomy between reason and fancy is initiated here and developed in "The Indian Burying Ground." In both, fancy is shown to be delusive and less than reliable, yet both the explorer and the visitor to the burying ground realize that reason alone is insufficient. Reason tells Columbus that his belief in the existence of the new world is sound; nevertheless, he implores fancy to his aid and seeks out the Inchantress. Reason tells the visitor that--lie, sit, or stand--the dead experience only oblivion, yet he acknowledges that even reason must sometimes "bend the knee" to the "shadows and delusions" of fancy. Clearly, the imaginative faculty must be exercised, under control and in cooperation with the rational faculty, if we are to achieve an understanding of ourselves and our world. The relationship between art and nature explored in "The Man of Ninety" seems to support this concept. Note that art, the product of controlled imagination, may serve to temper the harsh impact of the natural processes of decay and degeneration. Perhaps the relationship between reason and fancy which is suggested in these poems suggests the function of the creative

process in mediating Freneau's dark cosmic view. He seems to control the productions of his imagination in order to interpret that which he rationally construes. However, art yields to nature: the painting on the rock is gradually worn away by "wearing rains"; the soil artfully laid about the roots of the oak can easily be eroded. The elemental waters which provide the experiences of reality seem to brook no artifice; however, Freneau appears to attempt to balance rational resignation with imaginative hope. Both "The Indian Burying Ground" and "The Man of Ninety" express views which are consistent with the one at which Columbus arrives, that, though fancy may deceive, one must strive both rationally and imaginatively to seek "new worlds." Both Columbus and the visitor to the burying ground must step outside of their native grounds in order to perceive reality. One sails the alien sea; the other treads upon alien soil, a stranger. Unlike them, the man of ninety learns nothing, though his tale is subtitled "A Visit to the Oak," suggesting that he, too, may seek to understand. The difference appears to be that the old man is unaware of his own essential nature.

The emphasis which Columbus places on the value of his striving is conveyed also in the tension developed between land and sea, the former representing passivity and delusion, the latter representing activity and clarity of perception. Columbus leaves the land behind, as do Ralph and the speaker of "The Departure," recognizing that, though the sea is "unfathom'd" he must attempt to fathom it. Columbus forsakes "sweet sylvan

scenes" which to the speaker of "The Departure" are delusive "fairy prospects," but both go to sea with fortitude. The dangers of being passively land-locked are suggested also by the fate of the wild honey suckle, which, lacking sentience, is doomed to repose in the "guardian shade" of delusion, unaware that it is unaware, not knowing that it does not know. Columbus, on the other hand, realizes that he must seek, as does the narrator of "The Departure." Freneau's concern with self-awareness is revealed not only through these personae--the explorer, in particular, being a fitting type to represent those who probe the worlds within and without themselves--but also through the scornful lady. The fair Celia, though ironically associated with the sea through the ship metaphor, has no conception of the significance of her own course. Celia knows herself not. All her "conquests [will] be repaid," says the poem's narrator, by death; yet she is oblivious to this fact.

The need for self-knowledge is emphasized then, by the inevitability of death, since by recognizing that we face this end, we may strive to live more meaningfully. Death's ineluctability is heightened in The Miscellaneous Works by Freneau's examination of the daily and seasonal cycles as well as by the awareness that there is that "other world." In both the "morning suns and evening dews" of "The Wild Honey Suckle" and in the Spring and Summer of "May to April," the poet recognizes that the natural cycle wheels away inexorably. Yet, as we have seen,

he perceives no evidence in the renewal of certain natural phenomena that man will be renewed. On the contrary, the death of the old is the necessity of the new; thus "Summer frolics o'er [the] tomb" of Spring.

Embodied in the tensions between reason and fancy, between land and sea, between passivity and activity, between appearance and reality, is, of course, the central tension between faith and doubt, belief and unbelief. Fancy can create heaven and the elysian afterlife, and the poet could passively accept the delusion of the land, the superficial appearances. Like his Columbus, he reasons that he should do otherwise, though, and he goes to sea actively to seek reality. Nonetheless,he recognizes the proper role of the imagination and realizes that the method of his attempts to probe the axis of reality should not be imposed on anyone else. Indeed, the examination of these selections from The Miscellaneous Works would seem to indicate that Freneau had reached the conclusion that each of us can discover the most apropos approach to discovering his or her own nature, that of the universe in which we live, and the relationship between the two. He reminds us that "we press to one abode" and warns, "If nothing once you nothing lose/For when you die you are the same." We must, therefore, use our "frail duration" to the fullest, lest we remain each an "empty image."

CHAPTER VI: "Belief and Unbelief": Poems Beyond The Eighties

Sometime between the publication of the 1788 and 1795 editions of Philip Freneau's poetry, a change seems to occur, and the controlled bitterness of the poet seems to begin to dissipate. When, precisely, this change happens is unclear; moreover, it could result from Freneau's political activities, from his financial insecurity, from his marriage, from his simply having grown older, or from any number and combination of unknown causes.[1] I believe that the poet had realized that he had found a working solution to his problem--not suddenly, but as a result of his consistent examination of the problem. At any rate, the poems of the 1795 and later editions tend to be less intense, less structually complex, and more philosophically mellow than those of the 1786 and 1788 editions. Representative selections from the last three editions of Freneau's poems illustrate clearly the extent to which the poet was able to grapple effectively with his realization that he must continue to strive to understand his own nature, that of the universe, and the relationship between the two.

1. *No Quiet Harbor* : Poems of 1795

Perhaps the crucial element in the development of the poet's position is embodied in the subtle revision of "A Moral Thought," which becomes, in 1795, "The Vanity of Existence" with the striking reversal of neo-classical formal and philo-

sophical tenets which is embodied in its vivid rejection of "That true life you best esteem." In short, the poet has clearly resigned himself to what he believes is the situation and has decided to get on with living, a decision implicit in the artistic strivings of '86 and '88. Other noteworthy revisions in the '95 edition would include the elimination of the captain from the barque on which Ralph, the lost adventurer, will sail, thus emphasizing the individual quality of his quest; the deletion of "Captain Jones" from the title of "The Invitation," underscoring the poet's desire to encourage his readers to participate in the quest; and the revision of line 40 of "The Man of Ninety Years" to read "the care of man shall life impart," suggesting the power of art to aid man in comprehending what he might discover on that quest. The final line of "The Wild Honey Suckle" is amended in 1795, "the mere idea. . ." becoming "the frail duration of a flower," and the narrator having effectively removed himself from the phenomenon he describes. Likewise, Freneau's restructuring of "May to April" for the '95 edition appears to be intended to soften the impact of the poem's sardonic irony and to create a tone which is less strident and perhaps more appropriate to the revision of "Summer frolics. . ." to "Summer dances o'er her tomb." The summary effect of these revisions seems to be to suggest that the poet has grown in his understanding of his own nature and that of the universe and is softening his tone. Such an attitude seems to be implicit in certain of the lyrics first collected in the

1795 edition, among them "Hatteras" and "Neversink."

Like so many of Freneau's poems, "Hatteras"[2] juxtaposes the security of land with the dangers of the sea. Life on land is safe and secure while life at sea is dangerous and capricious in Freneau's view. Moreover, "Hatteras" examines an aspect of human behavior which has not been directly touched upon in the works we have considered thus far. The speaker of this poem expresses rather openly his contempt for the pilot of Hatteras, a man who seems somehow landlocked yet who is trapped in the transitional zone between land and sea. This contempt is based not only on the pilot's status as part-time landsman, part-time seaman, but also on his relationship with his clinging wife. The attitude of the poem's speaker toward the "sallow" Catherine is condescending at best: much of the force which binds the pilot to his fate is embodied in the wife in her fear for his safety and her grief at his temporary departures.

"Hatteras" becomes, in one regard, an examination of a man torn between two worlds; one tranquil in its domesticity and alluring in its security, the other chaotic in its savagery and alluring in its danger. The setting of the poem is nicely suited and well chosen for this subject: Hatteras is in the limbo between land and sea; it is neither mainland nor island. Instead Hatteras is a low peninsula, a narrow strand of earth, an outer, leading, edge of land bounded on the west by the Pamlico sound and on the east by the Atlantic.

Stanzas two, four, and eight are added in the '95 edition of the poem. Stanza two functions along with the initial stanza to establish the land-sea conflict and to convey an ominous sense of impending doom which hangs implicitly over the entire poem. The poet takes some liberties with the actual landscape in order to heighten the juxtaposition of land and sea. Having reached these outer banks while fighting the strong "western gale" (l. 4), the speaker surveys the "bare and barren" cliffs (l. 5) of a forsaken, forbidding piece of real estate. In fact, Hatteras has no cliffs, but is a low lying sand spit; however, the poet often employs cliffs and mountains in contrast with the sea in order to suggest stability and permanence, as he will do in "Neversink." These cliffs are themselves foreboding in their bareness and barrenness and are set against the "shallow grounds and broken reefs" (l. 7) and the "dangerous shoal" (l. 9), all of which are low-lying and potentially destructive. Waves broken "in columns to the sky" (l. 10) are also juxtaposed with the sterile cliffs to heighten our sense of the dangers of the outer banks. The setting is augmented by "black" tempests "hourly" raving (l. 11): small wonder that the speaker's dreams are "sad" as he rides on the "ocean's verge" (l. 13). Flowing around him is the Atlantic, chaotic and powerful; "no traveller finds repose"on her (l. 16). Ironically, the land and its outcroppings are equally dangerous, a fact which characterizes the poet's handling of the relationship between land and sea. Neither place, really, is a place of safety.

"Hatteras" opens, then, with a rugged, fully realized, stark description of barren land, dangerous shoals, and surging seas where the speaker pauses as his craft coasts the mainland. There is nothing here to "console [his] stay" (l. 8). He senses "all danger nigh" (l. 16) in an ironic variation on the pattern we have come to expect. Here "all danger" is the quality of land and sea in their conflicting relationship with each other, rather than solely the condition of the sea as in "The Hurricane." There have been, in other poems, to be sure, consistent intimations that land may be dangerous, but here those dangers are implicit in its very nature.

The pilot of Hatteras is firmly rooted to this wild spot, yet he seems constantly to seek temporarily to escape it. But his barque is "frail" (l. 18); its sails are "tottering" (l. 42); they cannot carry him far. He is "condemn'd to pass his years" (l. 21) here: "no other shores delight his eye" (l. 23), but he is safe here and secure. Yet one supposes that the speaker of "Hatteras" would deem any man condemned who is not free to sail to sea. Of course, the pilot's condemnation consists in more than simply the fact that his hut is built here in deep woods (l. 25). He is "devoted to repose" (l. 26), our narrator tells us, and deep woods are the ideal place for repose. However, though his garden blooms here in the otherwise "barren wilds" (l. 27), his wife does not. She is a sickly "sallow hue" (l. 29) yet for her he "toils" and to her is "true" (l. 31), for he is "the captive of her face" (l. 32). He is thus condemned prisoner to his land and to his woman, though his occupation

frequently allows his temporary escape.

Stanza four introduces mention of deep woods and repose, concepts linked in Freneau's works with sterile passivity. Like the "bare and barren cliffs," the "depths of woods" (1.25) are the poet's invention: Hatteras has none. The creation of the non-existent features perhaps suggests the poet's artistic intent. He is clearly out to differentiate the land and sea symbolically, and also to heighten the sterility and passivity of life on land. Also stressed in stanza four is the tint of Catharine's skin: perhaps the dullness of the pilot's life is conveyed in the sallowness of his wife's face. The sickly color and the bareness and barrenness of the cliffs are complementary and render the presence of the "little garden" blooming rather incongruous. One wonders that anything could grow here, but perhaps the garden suggests the productive potential of the pilot. However, "no mingled colours" (l. 30) relieve the unbroken penury of his existence: he seems impoverished spiritually as well as economically. Clearly his only relief is the sight of "some gliding barque. . .bound for Ocracock," (ll. 39-40). For then he may momentarily escape the captivity of his "wedded nymph[s]" (l. 29) face and for a short time free himself from the land.

As the final stanza reveals, the captain-poet sympathizes with the pilot, wishing to send him ashore safely before the "eastern gales once more awake" (l. 65). They share a glass, and the speaker's identification with the pilot is crucial to

the poem's significance. Actually, the speaker himself realizes the danger of the sea--"Alack! I see the billows break" (l. 67)--and would also seek safety from the sea were land and wife not somehow equally threatening. The captain-poet's mission is to travel elsewhere, so "go, pilot, go," he says (l. 71), realizing full well that they will be in a very dangerous fix once "the bellowing seas begin/Their conflict with the land" (ll. 69-70). Thus, though the speaker's attitude toward the pilot is on one hand disdain for his captive existence, his attitude on the other hand is sympathetic. Like the pilot, he too is somehow torn between two worlds, land and sea, security and danger. The pilot becomes, then, the emblem of the captain-poet's duality.

However, the sense that he is somehow like the pilot is not achieved in the first version of the poem. Here is the final stanza of that first version:

> 'Till eastern gales once more awake,
> No danger shall be near;
> On yonder shoals the billows break,
> But leave us quiet here—
> With gills of rum and pints of gin,
> Again your lad shall land,
> And drink—till he and all his kin
> CAN NEITHER SIT NOR STAND.

This stanza is deleted from the '95 poem, and stanza eight is added, thus totally recasting the ending. Stanza eight introduces the subtle fellowship and sympathy of the captain for the pilot, and stanza nine reveals the captain's full realization of the sea's danger while eliminating entirely the boisterousness of the original. In the original, escape is in the bottle; in the revision, escape is at sea, away from dangerous shoals

or a sallow face.

"Hatteras" realizes, out of a deeply felt personal turmoil, the study of a complex pattern of human behavior. Once again, the careful control of structure--Freneau employs alternating lines of iambic tetrametre and trimetre and an ABABCDCD rime scheme throughout--suggests that the poet has subjugated his feelings. Yet the straight forward, uncluttered language and sentence structure reveal that he has not artificialized or melodramatized them. Finally, the revisions suggest that the poet has considered carefully the meaning of the feelings which motivate this poem and has attempted to express them as effectively as possible.

"Hatteras" captures, I believe, the ambivalence of the captain-poet, but in a controlled, restrained manner. While the symbolic significances of the land and the sea may be rather apparent to the student of Freneau, here these symbolic values are augmented by the significance of the pilot, his wife, and the shoals and reefs of the outer banks. The captain seems a conscious projection of the captain-poet: both are tempted by the lure of the sea and by the security of the land; both go out to sea to escape the bondage of land and because they need money;[3] both, in short, seem to vacillate between land and sea. I believe that this vacillation is expressed in the title the speaker gives himself: he is a "wandering bard," a seeker like Ralph. However, the pilot goes beyond simple uncontrolled projection to generate a sense of a real, representative human being. Moreover, the shoals and reefs may be seen to represent

the hidden dangers, not only of land and sea, but also of simple day to day existence. Were the captain-poet to travel across them he would need the pilot's expert guidance; however, he goes his own way, and goes on his own.

Though the allure of the sea is great and the need to seek confrontation with elements is great, the land reminds the sailor constantly of the security he has left behind. In "Neversink,"[4] Freneau uses New Jersey's Navesink hills to represent the solidity, permanence, and security of land. In this poem all of the poet's wistful consciousness of what he sacrifices in order to quest seems to surface. Life in the "Neversink" hills would not be, somehow, the debilitating, destructive experience which life on land is generally seen to be.

The speaker immediately puts "these hills" (l. 1) into their relationship with the sea. They are "heights, for solitude design'd" (l. 5), a "rude, resounding shore" (l. 6) which is both "bold and rugged" (l. 3). They are, significantly, "the pride of all the coast/To mighty distance seen" (ll. 1-2), and much of their appeal for the speaker lies in the fact that they can be seen from ships standing far out to sea. This quality of mountains is one to which Freneau regularly alludes in characterizing them.[5]

The speaker values these proud heights not only for their aspect, but also for their stability and permanence and the safe harbors among them, the "vales impervious to the wind" and the "tall oaks, that to the tempest bend" (ll. 7-8). These mountains have been here to greet "a thousand sails" (l. 10). They were

here before the "angry Briton came" (l. 12) and remained when he had gone. Their "towering crest" (l.13) is the first news of the approach to land and conversely the last sight of land when parting--approach brings "fresh joys" to the sailor's heart; departure brings "a heavy heart" (ll. 15-16), as does "the lover's long farewell" (l. 17), a line which evokes strongly the wistfulness of departure.

The speaker's adoration of these hills is the result of his being "Half Druid" (l. 9), for he thus holds the oak that grows here sacred. His identification with the Druids suggests the reverence in which he holds the land and implies further a priestly adoration, the adoration of awe and respect, as though the hills and their vales and oaks were sacred in fact. We should note too, that here the half-Druid speaker will be safe from the storm. The vales of Neversink are "impervious to the wind"; the oaks "bend. . .to the tempest" (ll. 7-8). Here one is not driven willy-nilly by the winds of chance, but is secure. The oak, unlike the feeble barque, simply bends with the breeze and is thus relatively unaffected by its power. However, the wind imagery of the poem may also suggest the limitations of life on land. Though secure, it lacks the adventure of being wafted on the winds and may thus preclude the poetic inspiration which life at sea has provided the poet.

Stanza three, the poem's center, establishes the contrast between land and sea: the "sailor bold" who continues to sea is "of persevering mind" (ll. 19-20). His perseverance, is, of course, what causes him to continue to seek. The speaker

characterizes his quest as roving "in search of care" and leaving "true bliss behind" (11. 21-22). His road is "tiresome"; he hastens over the ocean "chac'd" by "wintry seas and tempests" (11. 24-25). The vast ocean is a "comfortless abode" (1. 26),yet the bold sailor endures in the pursuit of his goals.

Significantly, stanza three is the most thoroughly revised of the poem. While the revised stanza alludes to the "sailor bold" as though he and the narrator were two separate persons, the original stanza focuses on the first person narrator. In the original, it is the speaker who roves "in search of care"; he "rigs his barque so trim" to seek the sea. The revision separates the speaker from the activity described and seems also to distance the poet somewhat. Apparently, the poet wishes to remove himself in order to control the intensity of his own involvement in the poem. Though still clearly associated with the poet, the first person narrator seems less so in the second version than in the first. However, the fact that the poet did not republish the poem in the editions after 1795 may perhaps suggest that he felt that the relationship was too close and too obvious.

Stanza four returns to the description of the land and confirms the speaker's strong desire to continue there undisturbed. The blue waters of Neversink's "thousand springs" (1. 28) are juxtaposed with the wintry seas and the tempests of the previous stanza. These waters are a "luxury to sip" (1. 29) and seem part of an idyllic pastoral setting. Deer herd in these "vast retirements" where in "dark groves" they abound (11. 30-34).

Yet, as always, there is something threatening here: the groves are dark, and we recall here that, in line 4, the "aspect" and "brow" of the mountains shade the ocean. As we know, these words are suggestive in Freneau that all is not as it should be, and we learn that "the trembling rustic flies" (ll. 35-36) these dark groves because they are "haunted still by Huddy's ghost." In spite of his Druidic adoration of the oaks, his awe and respect for the solidity and permanence of the hills of Neversink, the speaker recognizes implicitly the potentially destructive influences of the shore. These are the dark groves of vast retirement wherein we may destroy ourselves through our own inactivity. Though the danger of the land is only implied here, one senses the destructive qualities of life on land which are explicit in poems such as "Hatteras."

The final stanza of "Neversink" is a rejection of the sea: these final comments include even a condemnation of those who continue to sea: "Let those who pant for wealth or fame/Pursue the watery road " (ll. 41-42). Yet surely the sailor bold of stanza three does not so "pant"; we are told he sails "in search of care" (l. 22). Apparently either these are two types of men who go to sea or the speaker is simply over-reacting in attempting to justify his choice to stay ashore. If the latter is the case, then the speaker may be condemning the life at sea as a combination of greed and pride simply to justify his own decision. If the former, the speaker may be suggesting that only those who do "pant for wealth and fame" will achieve

any concrete goal at sea. Since his seeking is continuous by its very nature, the bold sailor will never achieve any concrete goal.

The speaker, "tenacious of the shore" (l. 40), is juxtaposed with the bold sailor, of persevering mind, in a manner which emphasizes the juxtaposition of the ocean--"a comfortless abode" (l. 27) and the shore--"retirement's blest abode" (l. 45). The repetition of "abode" is stressed by the echoing of "tiresome road" (l. 24) and "watery road" (l. 42). The sailor and the speaker are linked by their common steadfastness-one is "persevering," the other "tenacious"--but they are, of course, opposites in that one quits the sea to accept the blessings of retirement: "Soft sleep and ease, blest days and nights,/And health" (ll. 43-44).

I would argue that the two are, again, the two halves of a personality torn by the equally strong attraction of two ways of life. Like the pilot of Hatteras in his complex relationship with the captain-poet, the sailor bold and the speaker of this poem represent the poet's split self. As always, the poet is implicitly aware of the relative value of the two experiences: one leaves the true bliss to seek cares; the other finds health in the oblivion of soft sleep.

"Neversink" seems to be similar to "The Vanity of Existence," in that here the poet achieves a kind of stoic resignation and chooses to accept the fact that life on land may become sterile, but that its security in nonetheless appealing. Yet, like "Hatteras," "Neversink" seems to capture the wistful ambivalence of a man torn between two worlds.

Published only a short while after Freneau's retirement in late 1789 as a sea captain and his marriage in April, 1790, "Neversink" may perhaps be read as the poet's attempt to reconcile himself to life on land. The poem seems related in this regard to "Hatteras" with the obvious difference that this poem extols life on land while the other condemns that life. Both poems seem closely based on the psychic experiences of specific periods of the poet's life, yet both, though intensely personal, avoid the mawkish self-consciousness which mars the original of "The Dying Elm." By 1795, Freneau's work, it seems to me, is marked by the restraint and control which suggest that the poet's striving to understand has continued to bear fruit.

2. Perch'd on Eagle's Wing - Poems of 1809

As does the 1795 edition, the 1809 edition reveals not only the care which Freneau characteristically takes in revising his poems, but also the continued development of his thought. For example, Freneau revises line 16 of "The Indian Burying Ground" in '09, "finer essences" becoming "old ideas," thus disassociating the speaker from any belief that there is such a thing as a "finer essence" which lives on after death and instead suggesting that such a belief is in fact only an "old idea" which the speaker rejects. Furthermore, the poet made unobtrusive but significant changes in such poems as "The Dying Elm," "The Dying Indian," "The Hurricane,"and "The Vernal Ague"[6] which seem consistently to distance the narrator/poet and to reinforce his rational awareness that the belief in an afterlife is simply an "old idea." "Science, Favorable to Virtue "[7] and

"Reflections on the Constitution, or Frame of Nature,"[8] both first published in the 1809 edition, illustrate the poet's philosophical stance at the time.

"Science, Favorable to Virtue" recognizes the mind's inability to grasp "the secrets of all nature" (l. 8), but argues that the striving to grasp is nonetheless valuable.

> Vain wish, to fathom all we see,
> For nature is all mystery;
> The mind, though perched on eagle's wings,
> With pain surmounts the scum of things.
>
> Her knowledge on the surface floats,
> Of things supreme she dreams or doats;
> Fluttering awhile, she soon descends,
> And all in disappointment ends.
>
> And yet this proud, this strong desire,
> Such ardent longings to aspire,
> Prove that this weakness in the mind
> For some wise purpose was designed.
>
> From efforts and attempts, like these,
> Virtue is gained by slow degrees;
> And science, which from the truth she draws,
> Stands firm to Reason and her cause.
>
> (ll. 9-24)

The eagle wing'd mind aspires because its nature, the poet believes, is to do so: the mind was "designed" for this wise purpose. The mind's "activity that wants no rest" lies, as we have seen, in the individual's constant attempts to understand. By 1809, the poet was able to express this perception of truth directly in a contemplative poem; previously he had chosen to express himself metaphorically, perhaps because he had been unable clearly to realize and fully to grasp the position toward which he had been groping, or perhaps because he had not been ready to express himself openly. At any rate, "Science, Favora-

ble to Virtue" seems to me to be a succinct statement of Freneau's credo. Since ultimately we will sink to oblivion, we can endow our lives with value now through "efforts and attempts, like these."

By 1809, Freneau also appears to have been ready to posit that the existence of a creator is a rationally valid inference. However, though "Reflections on the Constitution, or Frame of Nature" states that the individual may deduce the existence of this creator by his or her observation of nature, we should recall also that the poet seemed likewise to have deduced that there is no afterlife in the traditional religious sense. Freneau's position remains ambiguous, however, so it should not be argued that Freneau had whol ly adopted even so unconventional a religious position as Deism, as some critics have done.[9] The Deist's insistence on the existence of God is often based on the very argument from design which the poet advances here:

> Great Frame! What wonders we survey,
> In part alone, from day to day!
> And hence the reasoning, human soul
> Infers an author of the whole:
>
> A power, that every blessing gives,
> Who through eternal ages lives,
> All space inhabits, space his throne,
> Spreads through all worlds, confin'd to none;
>
> Infers, through skies, o'er seas, o'er lands
> A power throughout the whole commands;
> In all extent its dwelling place,
> Whose mansion is unbounded space.
>
> Where ends this world, or when began
> This spheric point displayed to man?--
> No limit has the work divine,
> Nor owns a circumscribing line.

> Beyond what mind or thought conceives,
> Our efforts it in darkness leaves; . . . .
> (11. 17-34)

However, while Freneau might, like Thomas Paine, conclude that there is a God, he clearly could not join with Paine in saying "I hope for happiness beyond this life."[10] Paine goes on to say:

> I trouble myself not about the manner of future existence. I content myself with believing, even to positive conviction, that the Power that gave me existence is able to continue it. . . .And it appears more probable to me that I shall continue to exist. . . hereafter than that I should have had existence, as I now have, before that existence began.[11]

Paine admits that he may or may not be rejoined with his body in the "future existence," but seems, nonetheless, fairly secure in the probability of that future existence. Paine's well known argument for the existence of God asks, "Canst thou by searching find out God?" And answers, "Yes. . .because I know I did not make myself."[12] Moreover, Paine asks, "Canst thou find out the almighty to perfection?" and answers:

> No; not only because the power and wisdom He has manifested in the structure of the Creation that I behold is to me incomprehensible, but because even this manifestation, great as it is, is probably but a small display of that immensity of power and wisdom by which millions of other worlds, to me invisible by their distance, were created and continue to exist.[13]

Paine thus concludes that "reason can discover [the existence of God], but it falls infinitely short in discovering the whole of [his attributes]."[14] In these two positions, Freneau concurs

with Paine, whom he admired greatly.[15] Indeed, "Reflections On the Constitution, or Frame of Nature" might easily be read as Freneau's interpretation of Paine's position. However, the poet could not conclude even that there is evidence to believe that an afterlife is "probable" as Paine was able to do. Thus the necessity to fill the present life with value is of primary importance. Freneau had achieved then, by 1809, a philosophical and contemplative stance--he had mellowed: yet to argue that he had slipped comfortably into Deism is grossly to oversimplify both his beliefs and those of American Deists, who held various views on the question of "future life." Freneau's rejection of the afterlife and his insistence on the value of striving constantly to grasp the unknowable became his personal variation on the main theme. Deists, appalled as they were at the imposition of any religious dogma on any individual, would no more have denied Freneau his private belief than would the poet attempt to impose his personal belief on his reader.

The extent to which the poet has reconciled himself to his private vision is illustrated not only by the open and accepting tone of these contemplative poems, but also by the fact that he has achieved the ability to deal with his dark perception humorously. Freneau's lack of humor is evident in the earlier poetry; even his "satires" are generally strident and bitter rather than broadly funny, and the lyrics can hardly be seen as anything other than deadly serious. Now, however, the poet is capable of being wryly witty. "On a Honey Bee, Drinking from a Glass of Wine, and Drowned Therein,"[16] demon-

strates this tone, and also the poet's continued ability to craft a metaphoric statement effectively.

Thou, born to sip the lake or spring
Or quaff the waters of the stream,
Why hither come on vagrant wing?--
Does Bacchus tempting seem--
Did he for you, this glass prepare?--
Will I admit you to a share?

Did storms harass or foes perplex,
Did wasps or king-birds bring dismay--
Did wars distress, or labours vex,
Or did you miss your way?--
A better seat you could not take
Then on the margin of this lake.

Welcome!--I hail you to my glass:
All welcome, here you find;
Here, let the cloud of trouble pass,
Here, be all care resigned.--
This fluid never fails to please,
And drown the griefs of men or bees.

What forced you here, we cannot know,
And you will scarcely tell--
But cheery we would have to go
And bid a glad farewell:
On lighter wings we bid you fly,
Your dart will now all foes defy.

Yet take not, oh! too deep a drink,
And in this ocean die;
Here bigger bees than you might sink,
Even bees full six feet high.
Like Pharoah, then, you would be said
To perish in a sea of red.

Do as you please, your will is mine;
Enjoy it without fear--
And your grave will be this glass of wine,
Your epitaph--a tear--
Go, take your seat in Charon's boat,
We'll tell the hive, you died afloat.

The speaker playfully personifies the bee by ascribing incongruously to him various motivations which might lead a human to seek a glass of wine: the simple pleasure of a sip; the escape from trials and frustrations; the confusion of having "miss[ed

the] way." But none of these reasons brings the bee to the glass: he simply seeks the sweetness of the wine. However, the poem functions at its most basic level by relating the bee metaphorically to man; his behavior becomes representative, and the poem's effect is enhanced by its ironically facetious tone.

Good humoredly, the speaker welcomes his minute guest, attributing to him perhaps the same motivations which brought him to the glass himself:

> This fluid never fails to please,
> And drown the griefs of men or bees.

The irony of these lines is that wine will drown more than the bee's "griefs"--it will drown him, as this statement foreshadows. This is the danger which the honey-bee cannot comprehend. The speaker realizes that the bee, like many men who seek solace in the bottle, can "scarcely tell" what "forced" him there. Whether forces within himself--his own instinct to taste the sweetness of the wine--or forces outside himself--wars, wasps, or king-birds--the forces which bring the bee to the lip of the glass are beyond his power to articulate. In the same way, the forces which drive men either to seek new experiences or to seek escape are often beyond their power to articulate. Thus the responsibility for examining these forces falls to the poet.

A sip of the wine, like the taste of a new experience, can rejuvenate. The speaker hopes that this will be the case and that the bee will fly away on "lighter wings." However, the peril of "too deep a drink" remains. The red wine is as dangerous an ocean as the Red Sea: here "even bees full six feet

high...might sink." While the reference to Pharaoh and the "sea of red" is obviously intended to heighten the poem's humor through the incongruity of the comparison of insect and king and the pun on the Red Sea, and while this humor heightens the effect of the poem's lightness of tone, the allusion and the tone conversely underscore the poem's central metaphor. A complex commentary is achieved wherein the activities of men who seek escape, even though they be "full six feet high" are satirized through the classic satiric mode of diminution, as is the folly of Pharaoh. Moreover, Pharaoh's pride, his lack of self-knowledge and inability to accept his own limitations in attempting to defy his own natural limits, is attributed to the bee. Neither bee nor Pharaoh possesses the wisdom to comprehend the limits of his own kind. Both court a destruction of which the tone of the poem ironically makes light.

Nonetheless, the speaker, though he perceives the danger to the honey bee, makes no effort to prevent the drowning. "Do as you please" he says, and "Enjoy it without fear." The speaker's attitude seems to be that the bee must be allowed to discover for himself what the results of his actions will be. It would be easy enough for the speaker simply to shoo the small insect away, yet he does not. One is tempted to draw an analogy between this detached observer and the god often posited as the creator of a mechanistic universe: both know exactly what to expect, but unlike the biblical god who drowns Pharaoh, neither makes any comprehensible attempt to change anything. That is, perhaps the warnings of the speaker to the bee are no more com-

prehensible to the insect than would be the warning of the god of the mechanistic universe to men. At any rate, it seems clear that the bee must be allowed to be responsible for his own actions even though he lacks the ability to discern the possible results of his actions.

"On A Honey Bee" becomes, then, more than a simple ditty or a mere cautionary tale warning of the dangers of the grape. Light patter though it seems, its tone is merely an ironic air surrounding a unique restatement of the poet's central credo. Thus the bee's situation generates a sense of the dilemma of man: he cannot know what the results of his action will be. However, the poet believes that actively to seek to understand ourselves and our universe through our experiences is better than to acquiesce in ignorance or to take the easy way out. Better to taste the wine of experience than to deny one's self the chance, even if one drowns in that heady wine.

The poet's attitude is embodied in the speaker's admiration for the bee: "We'll tell the hive, you died afloat" suggests a report that the bee died actively striving to taste the wine and create his honey from it, not that he passively allowed himself to be overwhelmed by it, and "down he went." The speaker says "We'll tell the hive." At first glance, it appears that the report to the hive will be made by more than one observer, that the speaker has companions who will also tell the bee's story, or that the speaker is simply using the editorial we to heighten his ironic tone. However, while we in lines 21 and 23 seems to refer to the speaker and his companions, there is no

other indication that anyone other than the bee and the speaker is present, so that syntactically we refers to them. The association of the two is stressed by the speaker's assurance to the bee that "Your will is mine" and suggests that the speaker identifies with the insect and understands his motivations clearly. The speaker's report to the hive and to us is the poem; the bee's report is the example he sets by his mingled courage and folly. The honey bee is destroyed by a force which is somehow beyond his ability to grasp and of which he is, in fact, only dimly aware. His instinct compels him to seek the nectar from which to produce his honey. The implication is that man is compelled to seek truth, though it may overwhelm him, just as the poet is compelled to seek the stuff of his art. The lightly humourous tone of the poem suggests a kind of understated awareness that disaster occurs when the seeker is unable consciously to understand his own abilities and limitations: A honey bee can fly but he cannot swim.

"On A Honey Bee," then, deals with the self-destruction which may result from the individual's inability to understand himself. This lack of understanding precludes an understanding of the universe in which the individual finds himself and thus makes his ultimate destruction inevitable. The key to avoiding self-destruction seems to lie in a kind of measured self-examination which would both give us insight into our instinctive drives and apprise us of our natural talents. The subject of this poem understands neither those instincts nor those talents.

The honey bee is doomed by his unconscious instincts to destroy himself and is juxtaposed with the consciousness of the narrator of the poem who has examined the situation in which he finds himself and attempts, through the analogy he draws, to understand both the nature of the reality he inhabits and the nature of the reality which inhabits him. That he accepts what he is able to understand is obvious from the detached, drily playful tone of the poem.

Thus, though the poems of the 1809 edition are less intensely personal, less powerfully complex, less artistically virtuous than those of the '80's, they are important in their quality of resolution. This is not to argue that the poet now sees all things clearly, but rather that he sees the essential ambiquity of all things clearly.

3. The Insect of An Hour - The Poems of 1815

> Outstanding, of course, were the songs and ballads of the War of 1812, but perhaps equally important was the series of contemplative poems- "Belief and Unbelief," "On the Uniformity and Perfection of Nature," and "On the Religion of Nature" - in which Freneau presents a summation of his mature deliberation on the "ways of God to man." Though there was much that could never be understood of her plan, Nature, benign, perfect, and pervading all things, moved steadily along her predestined way, in spite of, even making a place for man's chicanery, his superstitions, and his irrational hypocrisies. Freneau struggled no longer against discrepancies between things as they were and things as they should be. He was now satisfied that
>
> 'All, nature made, in reason's sight
> Is order all, and all is right!'[17]

There is no question that, in the nearly thirty years between the publication of the first volume of his poetry and the last, Philip Freneau underwent a profound change. Certainly the poems themselves seem more the products of calm contemplation than of intense personal experience and this characteristic may be the result of the fact that the poet was now 63 years old and no longer active as a sailor or as an editor-political writer; although he was still quite active both physically and mentally, his activity was removed from the dangers of both maritime and political storms. Further, the poems of 1815, perhaps because they are not as intensely personal, are not as condensed and tightly structured as the poems of the 80's; these are not emotionally charged works: the poet is not as likely now to weld sound and sense, for example, to underscore a particular image, nor is he likely to employ dense, ambiguous syntax to suggest the complexity of a problem. On the whole, the poems of 1815 state their meanings more openly than those of the '80's, though of course, they implicitly suggest more than they explicitly say.

However, while the poet's attitude--one of acceptance and resignation, the quality of resolution in the later poetry--is now calmer and more measured, and while the tone of the poetry is more serene and thoughtful, certain concepts have not really changed. Freneau's early lyric poetry seems to be the product of an active attempt to gain through probing experience the materials through which to grasp the significance of an incomprehensible universe. The later poetry, that of both 1809 and 1815, seems to represent the sifting of those materials, the

reaffirmation that the universe remains unknowable, and a continued examination of the central question in all the poet's work: Given the enigma, how does one live? Thus, though the poet may have reached a position of resolution, he was hardly "satisfied."

"On the Uniformity and Perfection of Nature,"[18] "On The Religion of Nature,"[19] and "Belief and Unbelief"[20] review the situation and state one aspect of the present status of the poet's personal philosophy. "On the Uniformity and Perfection of Nature" confirms the poet's acceptance of the essentially Deistical concept of a mechanistic universe and states that perfection may be discovered in the constancy and stability of nature. Nature moves "on one fix'd point. . .nor deviates from the track she loves" (ll. 1-2):

> Her system, drawn from reason's source,
> She scorns to change her wonted course.
> (ll. 3-4)

Nature's "system," however, is inexorable as well as constant. She cannot alter "her wonted course":

> Could she descend from that great plan
> To work unusual things for man
> To suit the insect of an hour--
> This would betray a want of power,
> Unsettled in its first design
> And erring, when it did combine
> The parts that form the vast machine,
> The figures sketch'd on nature's scene.
> (ll. 5-12)

Man, in the "design" of things, is unfortunately, merely "the insect of an hour." The "vast machine"[21] rolls on, regardless of him. However, despite her potential for unconscious hostili-

ty toward man, "No imperfection can be found/In all that is" in nature (ll. 21-22). For all nature "in reason's sight/Is order all, and all is right" (ll. 23-24).

Reason, of course, is the key. The poet has reached a position of rational acceptance: he sees that nature is "constant, still the same/In all her laws, through all her frame" (ll. 19-20), and his reason tells him that he must therefore resign himself to being what he is, "the insect of an hour." However, the problem which remains, that of how to live, is not handled in a purely rational way, despite the emphasis here on the faculty of reason: the poet must still rely to some extent on his creative ability in order to make the best possible use of the "frail duration" of his hour.

> All, Nature made, in reason's sight
> Is order all, and all is right.
> (ll. 23-24)

is a valid conclusion only because reason must admit that it cannot see in its entirity "the scheme of heaven" (l. 18).

"On The Religion of Nature" reiterates the notion implicit in "On the Uniformity. . ." that nature's system is a perfect one and goes beyond this assertion to state that man's ability to perfect himself depends on whether or not he can discover the elusive religion of nature.

> Religion, such as nature taught,
> With all divine perfection suits;
> Had all mankind this system sought
> Sophists would cease their vain disputes,
> And from this source would nations know
> All that can make their heaven below.
> (ll. 13-18)

Peace is possible; all wranglings would cease, if men could but discover the religion of nature. Nature's religion would allow men to "make their heaven below" for nature provides us with no evidence which may be rationally construed to suggest that a heaven exists elsewhere. Even so, the religion of nature does not require that all accept its tenets:

> This deals not curses to mankind,
> Or dooms them to perpetual grief,
> If from its aid no joys they find,
> It damns them not for unbelief;
> Upon a more exalted plan
> Creatress nature dealt with man--
>
> Joy to the day, when all agree
> On such grand systems to proceed,
> From fraud,design, and error free,
> And which to truth and goodness lead:
> Then persecution will retreat
> And man's religion be complete.
> (ll. 19-30)

Man's is used here both as a generic term and as an individual one so as to stress the individual quality of the search for truth. The tendency of established religions to condemn those who choose not to accept their positions is itself condemned. Because the "exalted plan" is not yet even understood, the day of man's perfectibility remains far off in the future. Man cannot achieve the "joy" of the day "when all agree" until he is able not only to comprehend the "grand system" but to concur on its substance with other men. As Paine says:

> . . .If ever a universal religion should prevail, it will not be by believing anything new, but in getting rid of redundancies. . . . in the meantime, let every man follow . . . the religion and worship he prefers.[22]

"Belief and Unbelief" argues that "On mere belief no merit rests/As unbelief no guilt attests" (ll. 9-10) and castigates the "creed makers" who "extort belief from man" (l. 21). The poet advances the view that conviction cannot "bind the heart"

> Till evidence has done its part:
> And, when the evidence is clear,
> Belief is just, and truth is near.
>
> In evidence, belief is found;
> Without it none are fairly bound
> To yield assent, or homage pay
> To what confederate worlds might say.
> (ll. 13-20)

And, indeed, he recognizes the fact that even should "they who extort"

> Exhibit, like the mid-day sun
> An evidence denied by none,
> (ll. 23-24)

"unbelievers" will still exist (l. 26), for the undeniable evidence will inevitably be "o'erlook'd" by some and just plain "miss'd" by others (l. 25). Their decision not to believe will be "just," says the poet,

> . . .for how absurd
> For evidence to take <u>your word!</u>
> (ll. 27-28)

"Not to believe" (l. 29) the poet therefore holds to be "the right of man" (l. 30) no matter "what kings have done, or sages writ. . ." (l. 32). The choice not to believe is

> Not criminal in any view
> Nor--man--to be avenged by you,
> Till evidence of strongest kind
> Constrains assent, and clears the mind.
> (ll. 33-36)

Consistent with earlier works such as "The Argonaut" and "The Invitation," "Belief and Unbelief" implicitly recognizes the necessity that the individual, through his own experience, can

come to his own decisions regarding what to believe and what not to believe. These decisions cannot be made for him by others, nor can others impose their ready made ideas on the individual who has discovered his own truth. Furthermore, by this emphasis on the primacy of individual choice, the poet reinforces the concept that the truth is not absolute, which concept is implicit in the recognition of the early poetry that reality is fluid and dynamic rather than fixed and static. In 1815 as in 1786, the individual must strive to discover truth for himself.

Perhaps Freneau's thinking is utopian; man, he suggests, can somehow understand the system and plan of nature and pattern his life after it. However, he has not yet been able to do so and the poet does not seem to think that he will do so any time soon. Implicit in these works is a tacit rejection of the "Christian conceptions of a divine plan for man's purification, resurrection, and immortality."[23] Instead, they assume, like "On A Honey Bee. . .," an impersonal creator of the universe --one who is beneficent, perhaps, but one who is no more concerned about man than about any other part of creation. The poet seems to insist that man can "find a sufficient happiness in accepting his incidental place in the grand design of nature"[24] if only that grand design is discoverable. And there is the rub. Perhaps the most basic cleavage between Freneau and Deism lies in Freneau's conclusion that understanding of the grand design must be sought constantly. His position is quite unlike that exposed by Paine:

> The true Deist has but one Deity, and his religion consists in contemplating the power, wisdom, and benignity of the Deity in his works, and in endeavoring to imitate him in everything moral, scientific, and mechanical.[25]

Freneau, though his mind is "perch'd on eagle's wings," does not pretend to be able so to contemplate.

Instead, Freneau returns, in "Translated From the Third Book of Lucretius de natura rerum, or, On the Nature of Things"[26] to the possibility that the soul is essentially material. Freneau's awareness of Lucretian atomic theory was revealed as early as "The House of Night," as we have seen; certainly the sense of flux implicit in that theory is implicit also in Freneau's use of the seasonal cycle throughout his poetry both as a representation of man's transience and as a denial of the possibility of his spiritual rebirth. "Translated from. . .de natura rerum" specifically interprets Lucretius on Freneau's own terms. The poet quickly establishes the sources of our existence:

> Long before our natal day
> In secure repose we lay,
> In the elements immersed,
> In the moistening clouds dispersed;
> Scatter'd through the mighty void,
> With the winds we were employ'd;
> In the seeds of plants we stay'd,
> In the ocean's depths we stray'd;
> With the elements combined,
> To the elements confined,
> Scatter'd through our mother earth
> Till their union gave us birth.
> (ll. 5-16)

The "union" of the elements of which we are composed seems random and casual here, as though no creator is involved: Freneau is able safely to take this position since he is masked

as a translator. Next, he raises the central question:

> Then we knew nor suffer'd pain--
> Will it be the case again?--
> Does the soul, indeed, revive
> In some future state to live?--
> (ll. 17-20)

The answer, of course, is not long in coming:

> When our bodies are disjoin'd,
> Once uncoupled from the mind,
> Grief, or pain, we shall not know,
> All must to oblivion go!
> With the elements again
> Is our prospect to remain!
> In oblivion's passive state,--
> So decreed the words of fate. . . .
> (ll. 35-42)

Note that "oblivion" is passive for Freneau. Thus, once dead "We shall not feel, we shall not see/Merely since we shall not be" (ll. 45-46). The atoms which join to constitute the body and soul of the individual are "scatter'd. . .toss'd" (l. 43), but though "disunited" they are "never lost" (l. 44). However, according to the "translation," these atoms are incapable of recombining and reconstituting the individual who once was:

> When the dream of life is done,
> Animation lost and gone,
> Should these atoms, now we claim,
> Leap once more into one frame,
> Ranged precisely as before
> They would not the <u>self</u> restore,
> The same being, would not bring;
> ALL WOULD BE ANOTHER THING.
> (ll. 55-62)

The point here is, of course, to deny the traditional Christian belief in the resurrection of the body and its reunion with the soul after the final judgement.

Therefore, as it has been, "Freneau's locus of values must [continue to] lie in the realm of present existence,"[27] and the poet's quest for truth has evolved into the quest to discover the "grand design of nature" which will reveal to him how most meaningfully to live. The lyric poetry of the 1815 edition, characterized by "The Millenium,"[28] "The Brook of the Valley,"[29] and "To A Caty-Did,"[30] continues the poet's examination of the issue in the light of his inability wholly to grasp the full essence of the "exalted plan."

"The Millenium" shows that the orthodox Christian belief that man's salvation lies in some post-second coming paradise is a "superficial view" (l. 7) and that, to the contrary, man's ultimate perfection is attainable only through his transformation of his own nature--"He must assume a different heart" (l. 36). The poem is addressed "to a ranting field orator" and takes him to task as a "creed maker" and as one who "extort[s] belief!"

The poet's conception of "dame nature's plan" (l. 8) constitutes the core of the poem and is rationally based on the evidence that is available to him. Nature has made "various forms of being" as well as "the common tyrant-man" (ll. 9-10). All are "form'd with wise design" but all are individually "distinguish'd": between each form of being and every other form of being nature "drew the line" (ll. 11-12), and therefore each form possesses its own unique, individual, nature.

Symbol of this uniqueness is the lion. He is formed with

"visage bold. . .iron tooth. . .[and] murderous claw." His "aspect" is "cast in anger's mould" and the "strength of steel is in his paw" (ll. 13-16). The notion that he could lie down with the lamb is to the poet an absurd one--here I take the narrator to be the poet, finally unmasked. When the lion quits "war," the "trade" (l. 20) for which he is designed, he will no longer be a lion, but will "be changed to something new" (l. 23). The verb phrase which describes the lion's transformation, will be changed, is in the passive voice because the lion cannot change himself; rather, if change is to occur, the impetus must originate in some force outside of him.

"Apparent discord" then, is the system seen "through all this frame." Stanza five, the middle stanza of the poem, characteristically contains the poem's central metaphor.

> One system see through all this frame,
> Apparent discord still prevails;
> The forest yields to active flame,
> The ocean swells with stormy gales;
> No season did the God decree
> When leagued in friendship these should be.
> (ll. 25-30)

The primal elements have been set into conflict by the god who created them and who decreed "no season. . .when leagued in friendship" they should be: the forest, representing the fruits of the earth, is destroyed by fire; the waters of the ocean are swelled to chaos by "stormy gales" of air. Such is the nature of the world we inhabit, and that nature is mirrored in our own.

For man likewise is made: human kind cannot shun the "all pervading law" (l. 32). Before "discord can from man depart"

he must transform himself, remake himself, he "must assume a different heart" (l. 36). Discord is part of our nature, just as it is part of the nature of our universe; however, the responsibility for freeing ourselves from our passions is our own. Unlike the lion, who cannot change himself, man is, to some extent, able to exert control over his own nature: note that the verb phrase characterizing man's change is active and assertive--must assume. The poet courageously places the burden squarely on man. We are responsible and no power outside of ourselves may be held responsible for us.

The change can come only slowly, but may gradually occur through a kind of evolution in man's nature:

> Yet in the slow advance of things
> A time may come our race may rise,
> By reason's aid to stretch their wings,
> And see the light with other eyes;
> And when the ancient mist is pass'd;
> To find their nature changed at last.
> (St. 7; ll. 37-42)

"Our race may rise," the poet theorizes, "By reason's aid to stretch their wings/And see the light with other eyes." The "eagle" wings of reason are a part of man's own present nature. Perhaps the continued excercise of these wings will ultimately allow him to rise above the "ancient mist" and find that his nature has "changed at last." The time motif of stanza seven emphasizes the evolutionary character of man's gradual change: man's "advance" is "slow," but a "time may come" when the "ancient mist is pass'd." The pun on is pass'd implies not only "in the past" but also "is passed by man," suggesting man's active striving to pass above and beyond the mist.

The light imagery of stanza seven and the two following underscores this evolutionary development and suggests that man's ability to see--to comprehend and understand himself and his world--is a crucial facet of his evolution. Man, through reason, will "see the light"--his "other eyes" will be eyes which the ancient mist will not obscure, and which will be typical of his changed nature. Indeed, as he changes, his world also changes:

> The sun himself, the powers ordain,
> Should in no perfect circle stray;
> He shuns the equatorial plane,
> Prefers an odd serpentine way,
> And lessens yearly, sophists prove,
> His angle in the voids above.
>
> When moving in his ancient line,
> And no oblique ecliptic near,
> With some new influence he may shine. . . .
> (Sts. 8-9; ll. 43-51)

Even the sun, whose behavior is constant, is not static, but itself dynamically alters its course. Like man, the sun moves in "no perfect circle" but "prefers an odd serpentine way" which "lessens yearly. . .his angle in the voids above." Therefore, the quality of the light the sun sheds will be different, and he may someday shine "with some new influence." When that day comes, our ability to see ourselves clearly will be enhanced, because ultimately the sun will move out of his "oblique ecliptic" and shine directly upon us.

However, this time is afar off: the poet reminds us that "you and I will not be here"

> To see the lion shed his teeth
> Or kings forget the trade of death--
> (ll. 52-54)

The closing dash suggests the poem's open-ended, tentative quality. We hear no note of finality here, but rather the sense that change may gradually come, just as the sun "may shine" from some new angle. The transformation is by no means guaranteed. The responsibility is on man; even though nature, embodied in the sun, seems willing to co-operate with us, we must strive ourselves, through reason, to pierce the ancient mist which obscures our eyes. The note of affirmation here is characteristic of the later poetry, but should by no means be considered a note of satisfaction. Perhaps the new angle of the sun will burn off the mist, but we must first see the light "with other eyes." I believe Freneau means that those other eyes will be ones which harness the light of both reason and imagination as well, for to stretch our wings and to transform ourselves will require an act of self creation--an act of imagination, for reason may be balanced by imagination in the "apparent discord" which is our very nature.

"The Brook of the Valley" uses the brook as a metaphor through which to examine man's nature, and therefore, implicitly, to stress the difficulty of the transformation prescribed in "The Millenium." The poet explicitly states that the stream is the "emblem"of"restless man" (l. 49), and perhaps the key to their symbolic relationship lies in the very dynamism of that restlessness. Man's existence, like the stream's, is somehow dependent on his changefulness: if the pacific seeming stream were always "at rest" (l. 7), the valley through which it flows

would not, in fact, "be blest" (l. 8) but would instead be left "parch'd and dry" (l.12) by stagnant waters. So too would man find his world "parch'd and dry" were he to allow himself to stagnate. Man's nature, and the nature of the stream, is to be "now at peace, and now at war" (l. 51).

Perhaps this poem seems rather too obvious and public; after all, the "stream of life" metaphor is a tired one. But the symbolic relationship between the brook and the man is more profound than this. Both are integral parts of the natural universe. Like the stream, man's life flows "to the gulph that swallows all" (l. 16), the ocean of death. Like the stream, man constantly changes--"Though the same you may appear,/You're not the same we saw last year" (ll. 19-20). Each new experience, like each rainfall or the influx of a new tributary, changes man. What existed last year is now gone, but may return in a new form: The sun "can exhale" vapors supplied by the brook's "waste" and "turn'd"to"rain in yonder sky." These vapors become the lifegiving moisture which revives the brook's "margin" (ll. 28-32). In the same way, man, after joining his "ocean floods" (l. 24), returns in another form to mix with the elements of his universe and perhaps provide nourishment. He is no more and no less a part of the scheme of things than the brook is; the brook exists no more for his benefit than does he for its. Both are part of a fluid, dynamic, atomic universe.

However, as the emphasis on flux implies,the relationship between man and his universe and between the brook and its val-

ley is not always harmonious, and the suggestion is that that is as it should be. The fertility of the valley seems to depend on the restlessness of the stream; so,perhaps, does the ultimate harmony of the universe depend on the dissonance of its interrelated elements, and so does the evolution of man's nature depend on the tension inherent in his passions and in the tension between his rational and imaginative faculties. The "apparent discord" in man's nature becomes, then, not the cause of his damnation but a component of his innate desire to strive ardently, and an integral part of the dynamics of his ultimate wholeness, miraculously possible.

So the stream, though sometimes a "quiet flow," occasionally experiences some "quarrels" and runs "angry. . .all at war" (ll. 33-36). Sometimes the stream is quite out of phase with the rest of nature--battling with the rock and cutting the soil away from the willow's roots (ll. 41-44). Yet, again, the willow can only grow where, along the brook's banks, there is sufficient water, and so, too, man, when his "passions. . . cease" (ll. 46-47) will be in balance. Thus the brook becomes for Freneau "a sketch of nature's plan":

> Now at peace, and now at war,
> Now you murmur, now you roar:
> (ll. 51-52)

and "what a picture of mankind" (l. 56).

In presenting another "picture of mankind," "To A Caty-Did," somewhat in the manner of "On A Honey Bee," employs a light tone in examining the significance of the instinctive behavior of a small insect.

In a branch of willow hid
Sings the evening Caty-did:
From the lofty locust bough
Feeding on a drop of dew,
In her suit of green array'd
Hear her singing in the shade
Caty-did, Caty-did, Caty-did!

While upon a leaf you tread,
Or repose your little head,
On your sheet of shadows laid,
All the day you nothing said:
Half the night your cheery tongue
Revell'd out its little song,
Nothing else but Caty-did.

From your lodgings on the leaf
Did you utter joy or grief--?
Did you only mean to say,
I have had my summer's day,
And am passing, soon, away
To the grave of Caty-did:--
Poor, unhappy Caty-did!

But you would have utter'd more
Had you known of nature's power--
From the world when you retreat,
And a leaf's your winding sheet,
Long before your spirit fled,
Who can tell but nature said,
Live again, my Caty-did!
Live, and chatter Caty-did.

Tell me, what did Caty do?
Did she mean to trouble you?--
Why was Caty not forbid
To trouble little Caty-did?--
Wrong, indeed at you to fling,
Hurting no one while you sing
Caty-did! Caty-did! Caty-did!

Why continue to complain?
Caty tells me, she again
Will not give you plague or pain:--
Caty says you may be hid
Caty will not go to bed
While you sing us Caty-did.
Caty-did! Caty-did! Caty-did!

But, while singing, you forgot
To tell us what did Caty not:
Caty-did not think of cold,
Flocks retiring to the fold,
Winter, with his wrinkles old;
Winter, that yourself foretold
When you gave us Caty-did.

Stay securely in your nest;
Caty now, will do her best,
All she can, to make you blest;
But, you want no human aid--
Nature, when she form'd you, said,
"Independent you are made,
My dear little Caty-did:
Soon yourself must disappear
With the verdure of the year,"--
And to go, we know not where,
With your song of Caty-did.

The caty-did, as the poet reminds us in a note to the poem, is a grasshopper like creature which may be heard chirping its song in the autumn evenings; Caty-did is, therefore, since she will be readily associated with death and transience, an appropriate symbol of man. Silent all day, the small creature "sings [in] the evening" and "half the night" hid in the willow, in the shade, where she is unseen. Her song is "revell'd out" with "cheery tongue," probably because she is unaware that winter is coming.

The narrator asks whether she utters "joy or grief" and wonders if her song is not the expression of her realization that she has had her "summer's day" and is "passing, soon, away." Of course, the caty-did, like the honey bee, has no idea that it soon will die. Only the poet and his audience are aware of that. So it is not caty-did who is "poor, unhappy," but the speaker, who sees his own fate in that of the insect. Caty-did's unconsciousness is ironically juxtaposed with the

speaker's awareness of her fate and his own. Were she aware, the speaker believes, her song would utter more, for she would know that she might, through "nature's power," "live again. . . live, and chatter Caty-did." "Who can tell" what nature said, is the speaker's implicit question; perhaps the caty-did's leaving is only a "retreat." Her shroud, a leaf for a "winding sheet" may be only temporary, a kind of cocoon. But the speaker knows that Caty-did will no more "live again" than he will.

The shift in stanza five from Caty-did to Caty, apparently the child of the narrator, is signalled by the intrusion of an eighth line into stanza four and tends to heighten the personification of caty-did, as does the habitual capitalization of the term caty-did, treating it as a proper name. Stanzas one through three had been 7 line stanzas. Here, also, the poet utilizes the potential of caty-did for puns on forms of the verb to do and shifts from "Caty-did" to "What did Caty do?" Much of the light-humored tone of the poem is generated by the puns on Caty-did. What did Caty do? Caty, mischievously, has "trouble[d]" Caty-did: it seems that the chirping of Caty-did is more than Caty can bear at night; Caty refuses to go to bed while Caty-did sings. Yet the narrator admits that Caty was "wrong, indeed at [Caty-did] to fling" and has exacted a promise from Caty no more to give Caty-did "plague or pain" for Caty-did's mindless chatter is "hurting no one" and is only the tiny insect's instinctive behavior.

A second shift occurs at stanza seven and is signalled by a variation of the rime scheme used in stanza six. The 7 line stanzas generally rime in couplets in their first 6 lines and close with a repetition of the refrain of "Caty-did" as in stanzas one through three and stanza five; for example, the pattern of stanza two is DDEEFFA. In stanzas one and five, the A rime sound, hid/Caty-did, is repeated in order to emphasize the refrain and also to lighten the tone. In stanza six however, the poet employs similar end sounds in lines 1, 2, and 3--NNN--and then shifts back to the poem's initial end sounds for the stanza's final four lines--AAAA. This variation creates an insistent onomatopoetic phrase which suggests the actual "song" of the insect, especially in the repetition of "Caty-did" four times at the end of the stanza, and leads us into the next pun on caty-did:

> But, while singing, you forgot
> To tell us what did Caty not.

The word play here introduces us explicitly to the insect's lack of awareness of its impending doom: "Caty did not think of cold . . ." Even though the song of the caty-did foretells, like the vernal ague, of the coming of "endless winter's chill," the singer itself is unaware of winter's approach. Thus the little creature is unprepared for the encroachment of cold and ultimately death.

And Caty-did's fate is man's fate: "Independent" in that no other creature can forestall her doom; Caty-did must die. Nothing that Caty could do, no "human aid," would avail. Caty-did "must

disappear/With the verdure of the year" as part of the inexorable natural cycle. The speaker understands that the cycle will go on, but a mystery nonetheless remains: Caty-did goes "we know not where," for as always the enigma of death remains impenetrable. The poet calls attention to these suggestions by placing them at the end of the poem in an 11 line stanza which is the longest of the poem.

"To A Caty-did" is reminiscent in both form and theme of the poems of the 80's. Again the poet focuses on a natural object and employs its frailty as a metaphor for man's. Again, this metaphoric relationship generates a sense of the mystery of death. Moreover, Freneau uses rythmic and riming techniques, though freely and not as rigourously as we have seen them used, to emphasize various aspects of the poem's significance. However, the structural and tonal characteristics of "To A Caty-did" tend to place it in the context of the poems of 1815, for the relaxed rythms and humorous rimes tend to reinforce the sense of relaxed acceptance characterizing the speaker's tone, while the rythms and rimes of the early poems tend to stress the tensions developing in him. For example, the metre of "To A Caty-did" is various and relaxed, a mixed bag of iambs, troches, anapests; and the term caty-did is a ready-made dactyl. The resultant easy flowing verse and catchy refrain lend themselves effectively to the poem's good humored tone--the type of tone which is conspicuously absent in the early lyrics--without seeming incongruous to the poem's

subject matter. Some measure of tonal incongruity, as in "On A Honey Bee," seems necessary in order to juxtapose the attitude of the speaker--a kind of casual but considered acceptance --with the unconscious mini-tragedy of the caty-did. "To A Caty-did" captures once more the pervasive transience of life in its appropriate perspective. We are but the insects of an hour.

"When Vernal Suns Forbear to Roll" - Afterward

Philip Freneau's achievement as a poet clearly merits thoughtful reassessment. The body of poetry which he created contains a significant number of important works of art and presents a remarkable chronicle of the development of an individual philosophy. This achievement remains inspite of the notion, held by some, that "he wrote too much, too rapidly, and too long."[31] Certainly, one must grant that there is some truth in this assertion, but half-truth is misleading and some truth is no truth. Freneau's career as a partisan editor should not be allowed to over-shadow his accomplishments as a poet, nor should the fact that he was often reduced to pot-boiling. Lewis Leary has claimed that "it can be doubted whether the direction of literature in the United States would be in any important respect different without him."[32] Nonetheless, Freneau foreshadows in several striking ways issues which will be central in American literature. For example, Freneau's attempts to penetrate the surface of phenomena to probe their more profound significances is echoed in Melville's attempts to penetrate the

whiteness of the whale. Freneau's development of a practical personal philosophy results in a posture not unlike that of the pragmatism of William James: that which we accomplish--that which works in practice--is of value. Freneau's insistence on activity, often as a mode of refusing to succumb to his perception of the void, is later conveyed in the fishing and bullfighting and drinking of Hemingway's characters who lack Freneau's sense of purpose, and perhaps his courage. Like Hemingway's Santiago, the poet has learned that striving is its own reward.[33]

Ultimately, Freneau becomes a type of the American Adam: he examines the traditions of the past--artistic, religious, philosophical--and decides to strike out on his own. Freneau's individualism, his insistence on the value of his personal view and his unwillingness to impose it on anyone else, is similar to the individualism of Thoreau and Whitman. However, to recognize that such relationships exists is not to say that Freneau influenced the artists who follow him, and I can provide no evidence that he did. Yet Freneau breathed the same air, imbibed the same waters, and cultivated the same soil as his successors.

Freneau's poetry was, in fact, revolutionary. He consciously employed traditional forms in the creation of his own; he followed no one else's credo but developed his own. He succeeded in achieving the delicate balance between reason and imagination and thus was able to discover and speak his own private truth. And as personal as that truth is, he was able

to detach himself from it and examine it cooly and calmly. Yet, unaccountably, critics have satisfied themselves with asserting that Freneau was "thwarted" or "dwarfed" by his times or that "reality" shattered his "dream," and so a rich lode of poetry has lain unassayed.

This study makes no pretense of considering every facet of Freneau's art; however, if one were to consider only the handful of poems discussed here, one would surely have reason to reassess Freneau's reputation and achievement. First the poet looks the central enigma squarely in the eye: Is there, he asks, life after death? He finds no evidence that there is. Is life meaningless then? No, it is not, he replies. We may endow our lives with meaning through our actions.

The poems of the 80's wrestle strenuously with Freneau's grim awareness, and the lyrics of '86 and '88 crystalize the issue. The '86 poems seem to concentrate on expressing the situation as clearly and concretely as possible. Illusion is stripped away in "A Moral Thought" and the folly of wallowing in delusion is revealed in "The Vernal Ague." A working solution to the problem created by this stark world view begins to emerge in "The Lost Sailor" when we begin to see that striving to understand one's self and the unknowable universe is in itself valuable. The poems of the '88 edition work out the respective roles of the imagination, of art, and of reason in this process, particularly in "The Indian Burying Ground" and "The Man of Ninety."

The later poems reveal, I believe, that the poet had reconciled himself to his vision and had come to take great satisfaction in his art. A sense of artistic fulfillment may be extrapolated from the Reason/Fancy and Art/Nature concerns of the '80's and from the craftmanlike controlled intensity of the early lyrics. In the poems of the 1809 and 1815 editions, the ironic sense of humor revealed in "On A Honey-Bee" and "To A Caty-did" suggests Freneau's detached, perhaps wary, acceptance of his perception. However, I must emphasize that I find little evidence of the comfortable acquiescence in a mode of conventional Deism which some commentators profess to see. The contemplative-philosophical poems of the '09 and '15 edition, like the lyrics with which they are contemporary,reveal that the tensions between doubt and belief continue in Freneau. I believe that Philip Freneau saw an ambiguous universe until the end, and I admire his courage in continuing to gaze closely upon it and to report his findings. If that striving to understand is valuable--as the poet clearly believed it was--then Freneau lived a satisfying life of ceaseless striving.

During his lifetime, Freneau frequently alluded to his realization that his poetry was unappreciated and misunderstood. Two hundred years on, little has changed. Because I doubt that he would be surprised or disturbed, I feel sure that he would not long complain. For Philip Freneau, the act of creating poetry was an act of self-creation. Thus, he would continue probing

the axis of reality, for his poetry is dynamic process, poetry which develops as it penetrates the shifting, fluid reality it explores.

NOTES

Chapter One

[1] H. H. Clark, "What Made Freneau the Father of American Poetry?" Studies in Philology, XXVI (January, 19), 1-22.

[2] Lewis Leary, That Rascal Freneau, A Study in Literary Failure (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1941; Reprinted, New York, 1964).

[3] Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, 1961), p. 56.

[4] Ibid. p. 200.

[5] Robert E. Spiller, et al, ed. Literary History of the United States (New York, 1948), I, 174.

[6] Ibid. p. 169.

[7] Contradictory opinions regarding Freneau are also illustrated in Clark, ed. Transitions in American Literary History (Durham, North Carolina, 1953). In "The Decline of Neo-Classicism," p. 96, M. F. Heiser argues that Freneau was "neo-classic in form and thought," while Leon Howard, in "The Late Eighteenth Century, An Age of Contradictions," p. 85, says that Freneau's poetry is "by most of the common criteria. . . romantic."

[8] Frederick L. Pattee, ed. The Poems of Philip Freneau (Princeton, 1902), I. xcvi.

[9] Pattee, The First Century of American Literature (New York, 1935), p. 39. Pattee here reiterates remarks first made in the introduction to Poems, I, cviii: He "was a man equipped by nature for a true poet, a man with a message, yet dwarfed and transformed by his environment."

[10] Ibid. Poems I, ciii.

[11] Ibid. p. xcviii.

[12] Ibid p. cix.

[13] Ibid. p. cxi.

[14] Ibid. p cxii

[15] Clark, "Father," p. 3.

[16]Ibid. p. 4

[17]Ibid. p. 3; reiterated in Poems of Philip Freneau (New York, 1929), p. xlviii.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Clark, Poems, p. li; also "Father," p. 5.

[20]Ibid. p. lix.

[21]Clark, "The Literary Influences of Philip Freneau," SP XXII (January, 1925), 19-20.

[22]Ibid. pp. 12 and 16.

[23]Leary, Rascal, p. 26.

[24]Ibid. p. 29.

[25]Ibid. p. 96.

[26]Ibid. p. 100.

[27]Ibid. pp. 41-42.

[28]Ibid. p. 25.

[29]Ibid. p. 140.

[30]Ibid. p. 345.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Leary, Soundings (Athens, Georgia, 1975), p. 158.

[33]Nelson F. Adkins, Freneau and the Cosmic Enigma (New York, 1949), p. 77.

[34]Ibid. pp. 77-78.

[35]Ibid. p. 81.

[36]Ibid. pp. 61-68.

[37]Ibid. p. 33.

[38]Ibid. p. 63-64.

[39]Ibid. p. 61.

[40]Ibid. p. 62.

[41]Ibid. p. 66.

[42]Ibid. p. 50.

[43]Ibid. p. 49.

[44]Ibid. p. 75.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Mary K. Bowden, Philip Freneau (Boston, 1976), p. 127.

[47]Ibid. p. 141.

[48]Ibid. p. 142. As an example Bowden cites "On a Man Killed by a Buffaloe," Poems Written and Published During the American Revolutionary War (Philadelphia, 1809), I, 251. Hereafter this edition will be referred to as '09.

[49]Ibid. p. 149.

[50]Ibid. pp. 137-138. "The Modern Miracle" is contained in The Miscellaneous Works (Philadelphia, 1788), pp. 168-70. Hereafter '88.

[51]Ibid. p. 141.

[52]Ibid. p. 146.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid. p. 145.

[55]Bonamy Dobree, English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century, 1700-1740 (London, 1959), p. 258.

[56]Geoffrey Tillotson, Augustan Poetic Diction (London, 1964), p. 42-43.

[57]David Daiches, A Critical History of English Literature (New York, 1970), p. 766.

[58]Ibid. p. 774.

[59]Thomas Paine, The Age of Reason, Part I, Alburey Castelle, ed. (New York, 1957), p. 28.

[60]Ibid. p. 58. Paine's views will be more fully discussed in Chapter Six.

[61]Tillotson, p. 17.

[62] Ibid. p. 18; s.a. Daiches, p. 624. Dobree, p. 136, discusses "the excesses of inanity" of second rate poets of the genre.

[63] Ian Jack, Augustan Satire, Intention and Idiom in English Poetry, 1660-1750 (London, 1945), p. 156.

[64] Ibid. p. 139.

[65] Ibid. p. 148.

[66] John Dennis, "The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry," in Scott Elledge, ed. Eighteenth Century Critical Essays (Ithaca, New York, 1961), I, 105.

[67] See, for example, Jack, p. 135, and Dobree, p. 484.

[68] M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and The Lamp (New York, 1953), pp. 37ff.

[69] Jack, pp. 3-4.

[70] The 1815 edition collects poems which had been published as early as 1797, but reprints only one piece from the 1809 edition, a much altered version of "The American Demosthenes," and none from the earlier editions.

[71] Leary, in "The Dream Visions of Philip Freneau," Early American Literature, XI,(Fall 1976), reprinted in EAL's Special Bicentennial Issue: The Literature of The American Revolution, (Winter 1976), 54-80, points out that "much of contemporary commentary on [Freneau] or his writings seems to derive from repetition of what some previous commentator has said. . .with few indications that Freneau's writings have been read complete or with care . . . ," p. 57.

[72] Bowden, p. 53.

Chapter Two

[1] Leary, in Rascal, catalogues echoes of Goldsmith, Milton, Thomson, Pope, and others in "The American Village".

[2] The American Village," l. 156, from Freneau, The American Village, A Poem (New York, 1772) Reprinted in facsimile, Harry Lyman Koopman and Victor Hugo Paltsits, eds. (New York, 1962). Line and stanza references will be given (l. #), (St. #), respectively, throughout this essay.

[3]William L. Andrews, "Goldsmith and Freneau in 'The American Village'," EAL, V, (Fall 1970), 20.

[4]Ibid. p. 23.

[5]First published in United States Magazine, I, (August 1779), 355-62. Reprinted in The Poems of Philip Freneau (Philadelphia, 1786), hereafter '86, pp. 101-123; As "The Vision of Night (A Fragment)" in Poems Written Between the Years 1768 and 1794 (Monmouth, New Jersey, 1795), hereafter '95, pp. 92-94; and '09, I, 145-47. Line and stanza references, unless otherwise noted, refer to the first collected version of each poem throughout this essay. That is, here I refer to the '86 edition.

[6]Pattee, p. cv.

[7]Ibid. p. cix.

[8]Leary, in "Dream Visions," p. 59, argues that the original version of "The House of Night" is "in no sense a nonserious poem, nor a burlesque of anything at all." Leary believes that the 1779 poem is "the most personal that Freneau ever wrote, revealing tensions not yet resolved between what was required and what poetry demanded." The '86 version is much altered, as Leary observes. Edwin H. Cady, in "Philip Freneau as Archetypal American Poet," in Literature and Ideas in America: Essays in Memory of Harry Hayden Clark, Robert Falk, ed. (Athens, Georgia, 1975), pp. 12-13, referring to the '86, claims that the poem is "essentially nonserious" and is laced with "Halloweenish" and graveyard touches. The difference in tone between the '79 and '86 versions suggests, among other things, that the poet is seeking a detached perspective.

[9]Adkins, pp. 7ff., points out, for example, that Freneau's disillusionment with the study of divinity, "which is, in fact, the Study of Nothing," in the poet's own words, had led him to abandon thoughts of entering the ministry by spring, 1775. Leary, Rascal, p. 207, discusses the poet's later attitude toward clergymen: Freneau leagued them with kings as tyrants who abridge human rights.

[10] Clark, in Literary Influences, p. 21, discusses the relationship of "The House of Night" to Young and Blair, emphasizing the didactic purpose and sentimental tone of their works. Louis I. Bredvold in The Literature of the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1962), pp. 112-113, points out that, although Young was popularly assumed to be a "melancholy poseur. . .writing in the lonely hours with a lighted candle set in a human skull," the poet was, in "Night Thoughts," actually "preaching a severe sermon on the theme that death is inevitable to us all, and that its ghastly reality should sober both the reckless libertine and the complacent deistic philosopher." Bredvold further comments that Blair's "The Grave" is "a more macabre poem, though similar to 'Night Thoughts' in its stern religious tone." The purpose of neither minister-poet was simply to "cultivate melancholy for its pleasures," but, as Bredvold argues, their "real attitude and purpose" have been misunderstood. Freneau seems to me to have been toying with the popular taste in the 1786 version of "The House of Night" as well as satirizing the serious practitioners of didacticism in religious "graveyard" verse.

[11] See Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War, R. Livingston, trans. (New York, 1960), p. 160.

[12] Robert Blair, "The Grave" (1743), ll. 668-69.

[13] Adkins, p. 68. Adkins also discusses the influence of "Night Thoughts" on the poem.

[14] See Lucretius, On The Nature of Things, H. A. J. Munro, trans. (Chicago, 1952), Book III, pp. 30-44.

[15] Adkins, p. 75.

[16] Freneau's "Translated from the Third Book of Lucretius de Natura Rerum," in A Collection of Poems on American Affairs (New York, 1815), II, 126-28, specifically develops the poet's conception of Lucretian theory and will be discussed in Chapter Six of this study. Hereafter, this edition will be referred to as '15.

[17] First published in United States Magazine, I, (February 1779), 84-88, as part of "Account of the Island of Santa Cruz: Containing an Original Poem on The Beauties of That Island." Reprinted: '86, pp. 136-152; and as "Santa Cruz," '95, pp. 124-39; and '09, I, 207-219. The '86 version is much altered from the original and was in all probability written at about the same time as "The Lost Adventurer" and "The Hurricane."

[18]See Leary, Rascal, pp. 70-71, for example: "In 'The Beauties of Santa Cruz ' [Freneau] strode manfully along untravelled paths of poetic description." Clark, in "Father," p. 4, says that the poem makes a "Keatsian appeal to the senses of touch, taste, and smell."

[19]Samuel Johnson uses the term in Life of Cowley (1779), in M. H. Abrams, ed. The Norton Anthology of English Literature (New York, 1968) I, 1942, to express the view that "all the power of description is destroyed by a scrupulous enumeration." See also, Abrams, Mirror, p. 37ff.

[20]Leary, in Rascal, p. 71, argues that the poem is based on the assumption that "all nature was bound together in a close knit skein of logic--its beauty, its harmony, its amazing proportion. Only man remained outside the orderly plan; and man need not remain outside."

[21]First published in Freeman's Journal, January 2, 1782; reprinted '86, pp. 132-34; and as "To An Old Man," '95, pp. 193-95; and '09, II, 71-74.

[22]The few revisions are nearly all in punctuation, but Freneau also makes minor linguistic changes, such as your for thy, l. 25, and swells for waves, l. 79.

[23]First published in United States Magazine, I, June (1779), 280-81; reprinted in '86, p. 38; '95, p. 51; '09, I, 90.

[24]Vergil, Aeneid, L. R. Lind, trans. (Bloomington, Indiana, 1968), Book 6, p. 112, ll. 295-299. Vergil describes the elm as "huge and shady" and says that it

> Spread out its arms in branches, here
> False dreams, they say, reside and cling beneath
> All of its leaves. . . .

[25]In the '79 version, lines 11-12 are

> O gentle tree, no more decline,
> But be your shade and lovesick whispers mine.

The amended terms charming and shades crystalize the theme of delusion and lead to the association with Vergil's tree of false dreams.

[26]Adkins, Leary in Rascal, and Clark in "Literary Influences," have examined Freneau's classical training. See also Ruth W. Brown, "Classical Echoes in the Poetry of Philip Freneau," Classical Journal, XLV (1949), 29-34.

Chapter Three

[1]First published in Freeman's Journal (Oct. 24, 1781); reprinted: '86, p. 221; as "The Vanity of [Human] Existence to Thyrsis," '95, pp. 95-96 and '09, I, 148-49. Human is included in the tables of contents of both volumes but is omitted from the actual texts of the poem.

[2]Bowden, p. 146.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Leary, Rascal, p. 100.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Samuel Johnson, "The Vanity of Human Wishes," in Bredvold et al. eds. Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, 2nd ed. (New York, 1956), pp. 680-687, ll. 348-56. Note the ironic similarity between this title and the full title of Freneau's poem.

[7]Leary, Rascal, pp. 260-61, discusses Freneau's familiarity with the eighteenth century's use of the Indian as persona.

[8]The irregular or "Pindaric" ode was a widely imitated verse form during the early eighteenth century, following its popularization by Cowley. William Congreve, in "A Discourse On The Pindaric Ode," 1706, in Elledge, ed. Critical Essays, pp. 143-147, points out that Pindar's odes were not irregular in the sense that many of the odes of his imitators were. See also M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York, 1975), pp. 63-64. Abrams mentions that eulogy was a frequent use of the ode.

[9]First published in Freeman's Journal (March 17, 1784); reprinted: '86, pp. 350-52; '95, pp. 59-60; and '09, I, 100-102 as "The Dying Indian, Tomo Chequi." The editions before '09 are inscribed with the date March, 1784, and the Horatian motto, Debemur Morti Nos, nostra que, which translates freely "Ourselves and all we own, we owe to death."

[10]Leary, Rascal, pp. 261-63, notes that "Tomo Cheeki, The Creek Indian in Philadelphia" appeared in The Jersey Chronicle as a series of essays from May 23 to October 31, 1795. The '95 poems had been advertised in New York beginning on April 17, 1795, and so must have been in set form when Freneau began the series. Thus the '95 version of "The Dying Indian" retains the original subtitle.

[11] First published in Freeman's Journal (April 13, 1785); reprinted: '86, pp. 365-66; '95, pp. 270-71; and, as "The Hurricane," '09, I, 168.

[12] '86, pp. 86-87; reprinted: '95, p. 58; and '09, I, 98.

[13] '86, pp. 169-171 as "Captain Jones's Invitation"; reprinted: '95, 151-53, as "The Invitation," but given as "The Seaman's Invitation" in the table of contents; and '09, 230-31, as "Capt. J. P. Jones's Invitation." The short title will be used.

[14] Leary, Rascal, p. 96. See also Leary's note 38, p. 377, and Pattee, Poems, I, 290.

[15] "The Lost Sailor," '88, pp. 74-75, later "The Argonaut," is discussed in Ch. 5.

Chapter Four

[1] Leary, Rascal, p. 153.

[2] Ibid. p. 154.

[3] Ibid. p. 155. See also note 43, p. 372.

[4] Vernon L. Parrington, ed. The Connecticut Wits (New York, 1969), p. 288.

[5] The poem first appears in '88, pp. 1-30. Pictures II and III are omitted in '95, pp. 63-87, and '09, I, 105-129.

[6] Picture Iv, ll. 1-17. Further references to "Pictures" will be given (Picture #, l. #).

[7] Columbus speaks, at III, l. 12, of "Bright Isabella. . . whom avarice prompts to aid my purposes."

[8] First published in Freeman's Journal, April 18, 1787; reprinted: '88, pp. 163-65, with the date 1785, and '95, pp. 314-16, much altered, as "The Wintry Prospect." The revised title typifies the changed tone of the work.

[9] First published in Freeman's Journal, August 29, 1787; reprinted: '88, pp. 66-67: '95, pp. 91-92; '09, I, 44-45.

Chapter Five

[1] First published as "The Lost Adventurer" in Columbian Herald (March 6, 1786); reprinted: '88, pp. 74-75, as "The Lost Sailor"; '95, pp. 299-301, as "Argonauta, or The Lost Adventurer"; and '09, II, 201-202, as "The Argonaut; or, Lost Adventurer."

[2] Samuel Johnson, Rasselas, B. H. Bronson, ed. (New York, 1952), pp. 527-28.

[3] First published in Columbian Herald, July 6, 1786; reprinted: '88, p. 152; '95, p. 95; '09, I, 148.

[4] Bowden, pp. 147-48, claims that the poem is "well within the melancholy genre," that its "tone is conventional," and its "themes are conventional."

[5] First published in Freeman's Journal, April 18, 1787; reprinted: '88, p. 78; '95, p. 96; '09, I, 149.

[6] First published as "Lines Occasioned by a Visit to an Old Indian Burying Ground," American Museum (November 1787), pp. 515-16; reprinted: '88, pp. 188-89; and, as "The Indian Burying Ground," in '95, pp. 89-90; '09, I, 141-42. The shorter title will be used.

[7] Leary, Soundings, p. 151.

[8] H. M. Campbell, "A Note on Freneau's 'The Indian Burying Ground'," Modern Language Notes, LXVIII (December 1953), pp. 551-52.

[9] Adkins, p. 59.

[10] George Wasserman, "Item 43," Explicator, XX (1962).

[11] Martin E. Itzkowitz, "Freneau's 'Indian Burying Ground' and Keats' 'Grecian Urn'." EAL, VI (Winter 1972), p. 260.

[12] David A. Leeming, Mythology, The Voyage of the Hero (New York, 1973), p. 218.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Alan Watts, Myth and Ritual in Christianity (Boston, 1968), p. 160.

[15] "09, I, 258.

[16] Freneau refers to his speaker in "Neversink," '95, pp. 386-87, as "Half Druid" and notes that he "adores. . .tall oaks." The poet was evidently familiar with the druidic belief that spirits inhabit trees.

[17] First published in '88, pp. 64-66; reprinted: '95, pp. 127-29; and as "The Man of Ninety Years," '09, I, 202-03.

[18] "On the Fall of an Ancient Oak Tree," '09, I, 258, ll. 1-4.

Chapter Six

[1] On November 18, 1789, the 37 year old Philip Freneau left both the schooner Columbia and--temporarily--his career as a sea captain in the harbor at Charleston. He was finally to return to New Jersey and marry Eleanor Forman, 27, a neighbor in Monmouth. Her family is thought to have "looked with small favor upon the impecunious poet," (Leary, Rascal, p. 160) but they were married on April 15, 1790. Meanwhile, Freneau had ventured to New York where he had entered the employ of the Daily Advertiser, published by Francis Childs and John Swaine. As newspaperman, Freneau's concerns would turn more and more to the growing tension between the Republicanism of Thomas Jefferson and the Federalism of Alexander Hamilton. Naturally, Freneau, whose personal philosophy ardently embraces the primacy of the individual, aligned himself with the Jeffersonians. By February, 1791, Freneau had determined to return to New Jersey and initiate a paper there, the proposed Monmouth Gazette. Thus when a letter arrived from Jefferson himself offering Freneau a State Department clerkship for foreign languages, the poet declined the offer. However, the activity of the new capitol city, Philadelphia, apparently attracted Freneau, for finally, in July, 1791, he agreed to edit a paper there in association with Childs and Swaine and, in August, accepted Jefferson's offer of the clerkship. The salary of the clerk of foreign languages in the office of Secretary of State was $250 a year.

Freneau arrived in Philadelphia in October, 1791. Soon the National Gazette was born and began to attack the apparent desire of the Federalists to wrest control of the political processes of the new nation from the hands of the common people and place it in those of the aristocratic and the wealthy. The story of Freneau's career as editor of the National Gazette is well known (See Leary, Rascal, Ch. 8, and Jacob Axelrad, Philip Freneau Champion of Democracy, [Austin, 1967], Chs. 21-23): ultimately he was accused by Secretary of the Treasury Hamilton of acting in collusion with Jefferson "to vilify those to whom the voice of the people has committed the administration of our public affairs,--to oppose the measures of government, and. . .to disturb the public peace." (Gazette of The United States, June 5, 1793, quoted by Leary, Rascal, p. 208) This accusation was vigourously denied by Freneau, but led to increasingly bitter controversy between the National Gazette and the Gazette of the United States, the Federalist partyorgan, edited by Freneau's archrival, John Fenno. In June, 1793, Freneau, who was both an ardent Francophile and an outspoken anglo-phobe, even went so far as to criticize President Washington's decision to issue a proclamation of neutrality in the festering hostilities between England and the revolutionary

government of France. The poet/editor could not understand what he construed to be the Federalist desire to cleave to England, the former oppressor, and to reject France, the former benefactor. Freneau had already had the unparalleled audacity to wonder aloud whether Washington was "so much buoyed up by official importance as to think it beneath his dignity to mix occasionally with the people" (National Gazette, June 5, 1793; quoted by Leary, Rascal, p. 233). The criticism was too much for the father of our country to bear: he requested that Jefferson interpose and that he withdraw Freneau's appointment. Jefferson refused, saying, "His paper has saved our constitution which was galloping fast into monarchy. ...That paper. . .has checked the career of the Monocrats" (Writings of Jefferson, I, 231; quoted by Leary, Rascal, p. 233; see also Axelrad, p. 227).

Freneau continued to publish the National Gazette inspite of the opposition of the politically powerful--and even though the yellow fever epidemic of late summer, 1793--but by October of that year, his partners having declined to continue to underwrite a paper which was losing money, financial problems shut the Gazette down. His clerkship required more and more translations of Russian, Dutch, and German, which Freneau had to sub-contract at high rates, so even that position had become unremunerative. Thus Freneau determined to resign and return to New Jersey.

Once back in Mount Pleasant, Freneau established himself in the printing business, produced The Monmouth Almanac for 1795, began publication of The Jersey Chronicle, and collected and edited the materials for a new edition of his poems, Poems Written Between The Years 1768 and 1794. Fewer than thirty previously uncollected poems appeared in the new edition, yet the poet within the partisan editor had not been entirely quiet since 1788. However, from this point on, the poet's public life was serene. The Jersey Chronicle survived only into 1796, and the new edition of poems caused no great stirrings of interest. In March, 1797, Freneau accepted the editorship of the Time Piece in New York, a position which he held for about a year. In 1799, Freneau began contributing the letters of the "Robert Slender" series to the Aurora, and in December a collected volume, Letters on Various and Important Subjects, appeared. Finally, in the fall of 1801, Freneau, hard pressed to provide decently for his family, returned to the sea to sail as master of such vessels as the John, the Fanny, and the Washington until once more retiring in 1807. All the while he was writing poems and letters and contributing them to such periodicals as the New York Weekly Museum, City Gazette, and Aurora, an activity which continued regularly until at least 1824 (Leary, Rascal, p. 361). In 1809, Lydia Bailey, widow of the son of Freneau's original publisher, proposed to issue

a new edition and Freneau supervised its printing, at least partly out of loyalty to his deceased friend since the widow, having inherited the business, needed funds, as undoubtedly did the poet. The 1809 edition, Poems Written and Published During the American Revolutionary War, consists largely of materials which had been collected in 1795; fewer than forty previously uncollected poems appear. However, as always, Freneau carefully revised certain poems for this edition just as he had done for previous ones. Finally, in 1815, A Collection of Poems on American Affairs. . .Written Between the Years 1797 and The Present Time appeared. This edition is of particular interest in that it is composed almost entirely of previously uncollected or original poems and seems to represent the poet's mature vision.

Even after the publication of the 1815 edition, Freneau continued to write. Unfortunately, a fire in October, 1818, destroyed his home and, presumably, any manuscripts which might illuminate present studies. "Winter," a manuscript discovered in one of Freneau's personal books, is thought to be the last poem he composed; it is dated November 28, 1827 (Leary, ed. The Last Poems of Philip Freneau [New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1945], p. 123). Freneau's old age was spent in a poverty which is marked by the intermittent sale of family lands in order to raise money (Leary, Rascal, p. 362). In August, 1832, he applied for a government pension which he did not live to collect. Appropriately, Philip Freneau died not passively, in bed, but was caught in a snowstorm while returning from a visit to a tavern and died of exposure on December 18, 1832, only two weeks short of his eighty-first birthday.

[2]"Hatteras" was first published as "The Pilot of Hatteras" in the Daily Advertiser on November 14, 1789, at about the same time that Freneau arrived in Charleston and "retired" from the sea. In February, 1790, he returned to New York and by March had begun editing the Daily Advertiser. On April 15, he married Eleanor Forman at Middletown Point, New Jersey. "Hatteras" was revised and reprinted in the '95 poems, pp. 308-310, and was not again reprinted in the poet's collected works. The speaker here refers to himself as a "wandering bard" (l. 56); hence my reference to the speaker as "the captain-poet" in the following discussion.

[3]Throughout Rascal, Leary emphasizes Freneau's financial troubles. Freneau went to sea as a supercargo in 1784, but by 1785 was working as a printer; from 1786 to 1789, he served as captain of various traders, but in '89 left the sea again. In 1801, largely due to pressing financial difficulties, he returned once more to the sea. In 1807, the 55 year old poet left the sea for good. Ultimately, his poetic and editorial efforts being unremunerative as well, he was reduced to selling off his "sandy patrimony," the family lands in New Jersey and New

York. "Hatteras" may seem oddly prophetic but, by the time of its publication, the poet seems to have realized that financial problems would be continuously with him.

[4]First published in the Daily Advertiser, January 26, 1791; reprinted: '95, pp. 386-87.

[5]See, for example, "On The Peak of Pico." '15, I, 167-68; or "On The Peak at Teneriffe," '15, I, 177-78.

[6]These revisions have been discussed in chapters 3 and 5 of this study. Leary, in Soundings, p. 143, characterizes Freneau's revisions as puttering.

[7]'09, I, 261-62.

[8]'09, I, 262-63.

[9]See Axelrad, p. 52.

[10]Paine, p. 3. The Age of Reason was first published in 1794.

[11]Ibid. p. 58.

[12]Ibid. p. 28.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

[15]See, for example, "Stanzas on the Decease of Thomas Paine," '15, II, 28-29, or "Mr. Paine's Right of Man," '09, II, 294-95, which had originally been published in 1792, 2 years before the publication of The Age of Reason.

[16]First published as "On a Bee Drinking from A Glass of Wine," Time Piece, September 6, 1797; reprinted as "On a Honey Bee, Drinking from a Glass of Wine, and Drowned Therein," '09, II, 97-98.

[17]Leary, Rascal, p. 339.

[18]'15, I, 94-95.

[19]'15, I, 105.

[20]'15, I, 119.

[21]Paine, p. 12, refers to the "vast machinery of the universe."

[22]Ibid. p. 59.

[23]Darrel Abel, American Literature (Woodbury, New York, 1963), I, 223.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Paine, p. 42.

[26]'15, II, 126-28.

[27]Itzkowitz, p. 260.

[28]'15, I, 32-34; first published as "The Book of Odes, No. XX. To Santone Samuel, the Millenial Prophet." Time Piece (November 10, 1797).

[29]'15, II, 81.

[30]'15, II, 84-86.

[31]Leary, Soundings, p. 136.

[32]Ibid. p. 159.

[33]Leary, in "Dream Visions," seems to alter his position on Freneau's relation to later writers by reviewing some of the ways in which Freneau foreshadows them.

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